Bloodline

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/3542174.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Jack Crawford, Mrs. Komeda
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Vampire, Case Fic, Canon-Typical Violence, descriptions of crime scenes, Hannibal is a Cannibal, Blood Drinking, Vampire Sex, Mind Control, dub-con bonding, emotional blackmail, Hannibal Being Hannibal
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2015-03-15 Completed: 2016-08-18 Words: 35,224 Chapters: 9/9

Bloodline

by xzombiexkittenx

Summary

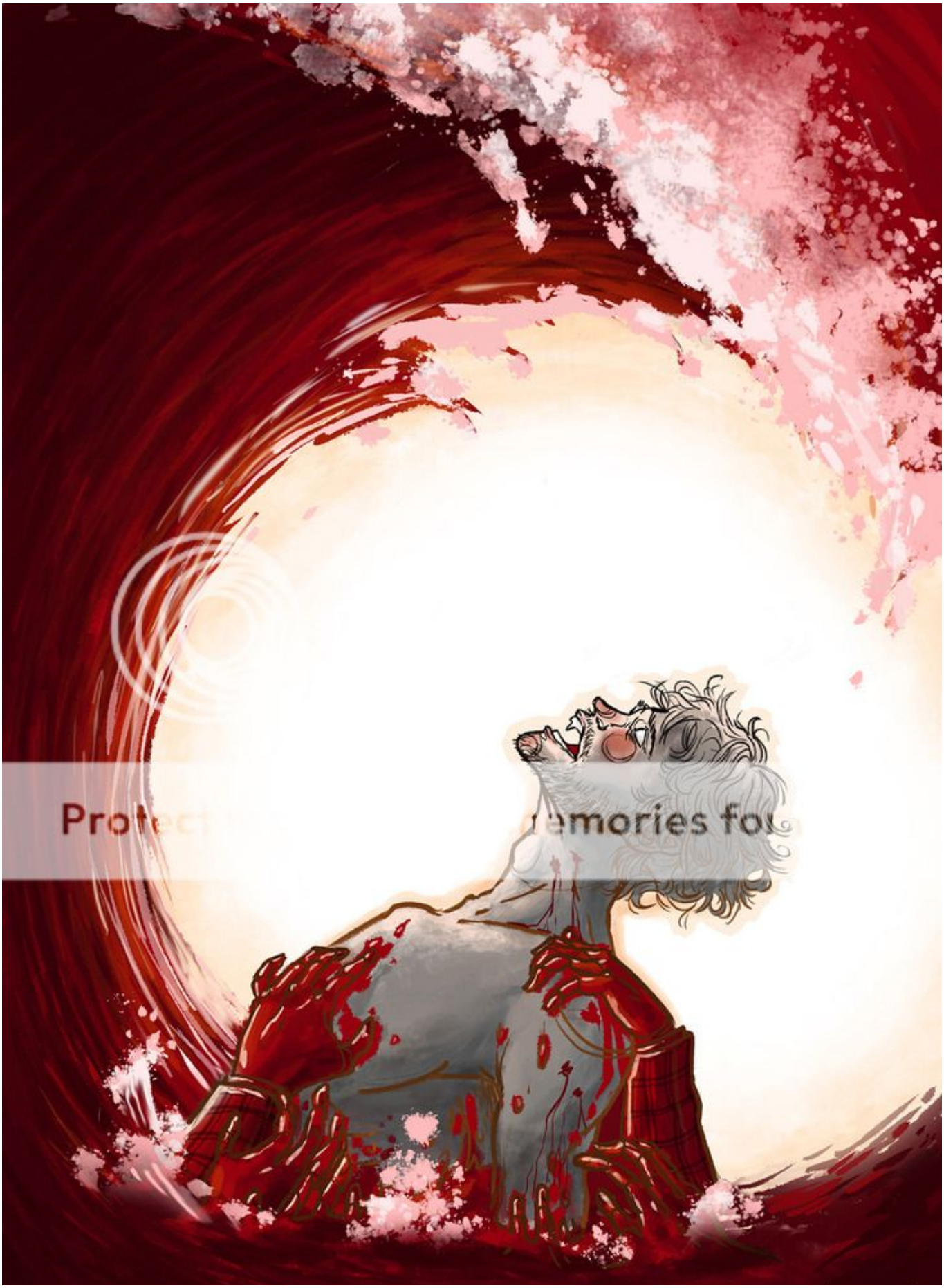
Someone is murdering fledgling vampires and it's up to Will Graham to figure out whodunnit while coming to grips with his own undeath. Ostensibly, Hannibal Lecter, whose noble and ancient linage opens doors for the investigation, is supposed to be helping. Helping, is not the term Will would use.

Notes

Translation in Russian available here.

- Translation into Русский available: Кровная линия / Bloodline by LenaSuperbee

Introduction: Death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[Amazing fanart by Iole]

Mosquitoes buzzed around, attracted by the blue lights of the police cars and the sudden influx of bodies. The run-down New Orleans street was filled with curious neighbours, half of them in pyjamas and the air was thick with their speculation and the crackle of radios. Already yellow caution tape was being looped around the house by rookie cops and the CSI descended, alien in their plastic bodysuits.

Detective Samuel Barrois let a paramedic put a shock blanket over his shoulders and watched as the last loaded ambulance drove his partner away. No sirens, he thought. Too late for sirens. He scrubbed his face and felt over two days worth of stubble scratching at his palms. Poor fucker didn't even have any family to call.

The Chief was there. He sat down on the tailgate of the ambulance next to Barrois and sighed heavily.

"He didn't take the shot," Barrois said, feeling numb. "Graham just stood there and that little junkie freak stuck a knife in him. He should've shot her."

"Knife didn't kill him," the Chief said.

The knife Will Graham took to the shoulder would have hurt, Barrois could see that much, but Will could have walked away from it. If the flop house had actually been a crack den, like they thought it was. Sure, it was a drug den, but there were two vampires all fucked up on angel dust. Barrois hadn't even known that was possible.

"Soon as he started bleeding, I could see it on his face."

Will had lowered the gun, blood soaking into his shirt. He'd looked at Barrois, sad blue eyes and this resigned look. It was even a little apologetic, like he knew whatever happened next was going to be traumatizing for his partner.

"He knew he was a dead man. Two seconds later it was like fucking Shark Week." Barrois put his head in his hands. "Stupid. So stupid."

The Chief patted his shoulder. "C'mon and let one of the rookies take you to the ER. We'll get you checked out, get the statement, let you go home. Get your head back on straight. You know he wouldn't want you to sit here like a dumbass sayin' shoulda, woulda coulda."

"Yeah," Barrois said. "I guess so."

They put the siren on for him and he wound up getting to the hospital right behind his partner. No one stopped him when he followed the stretcher.

"Last one," the paramedic said. "Detective Will Graham, twenty-six years old, massive trauma to the neck and shoulder, punctured subclavian artery."

The attending did her due-diligence but it didn't take a medical degree to call it. "Time of death-" she glanced at her watch, "eighteen minutes past eleven at night."

The walls had been painted red. Barrois had unloaded two full clips into the vampires. Their blood, Will's blood...Jesus, it had been everywhere.

"Vampires," Barrois said, as they pulled a sheet up over Will's body. Even dead the poor bastard still looked tired, dark circles like bruises under his eyes. "There were two of them and I shot them."

A nurse put her hand on his arm, gently. "Was he your partner?"

"They were right on top of him," he said, clutching the shock blanket. "Listen, they tore into him and I just started shooting. By the time backup came...You gotta understand what I'm saying. Both the vampires lost a shit-load of blood. It was everywhere."

The doctor frowned at him. "Are you suggesting he's likely to rise?"

Barrois' eyes felt hot and sore but he couldn't cry. The tears just wouldn't come. "Yeah," he said. "Yeah, I think he might be."

"Someone get the number for the local chapter of those orientation people...you know," the doctor said. She was trying not to audibly sigh, like the idea of Will changing was an inconvenience she didn't want to deal with.

"The Fledgling Vampire Orientation and Mentorship Program," the nurse filled in. "Yes ma'am."

The nurses laid Will Graham out in a room with no windows. The bed was bolted to the floor and had rubber under the sheets. The restraints they put around him were two inches thick and plated with silver.

Barrois let the nurses check him over, he gave his official statement, and changed into the scrubs one of the hospital staff brought him so he wouldn't have to wear his bloody clothing. Then he sat outside the room and waited. After a while he was joined by a vampire who looked as though he ought to be standing on a street somewhere hassling people about PETA. His white-boy dreadlocks and hemp sweater irritated Barrois. If Will woke up, if he rose, this idiot was going to be his introduction to his new...situation.

He was going to be so pissed off, Barrois thought. He could imagine Will - a little abrasive, a little sarcastic, smart as hell and happy to use that against people - taking one look at this guy and telling him where to shove it. It made him smile, and that, finally was what made him start to weep. His fucking partner might never wake up. Barrois was pretty sure that even if he did, he wasn't going to be pleased about it. Either way, he'd let Will down, and both of them might have to live with that.

Will might have to live with that for a really long time.

At about two in the morning, Will Graham's eyes opened and Barrois could hear his wordless, animal howl from behind the bulletproof glass.

The vampire liaison went in to do his job and Barrois was gratified to hear a stream of abuse aimed at Count Patchouli. Will might not be alive any more, but he was still a cantankerous son of a bitch. And that was something, at least.

The Day Job

The cadets were actually paying attention to Will's lecture. Not that they were inattentive on other days, but everyone was interested in the Van Helsing murders - thank you Freddie Lounds for that particular nickname. He could feel their attention like a living thing, crawling down from the gallery to press against his head with greedy hands.

The Van Helsing murders had all the necessary components to capture the popular imagination: gruesome tableaus with an ironic message, and an uncaught serial killer who preyed on vampires. It brought out the latent, or not so latent, prejudices people carried against the undead. Easier to really get into the shock and awe of it if you didn't see the victims as human. Will wasn't looking forward to the outpouring of ghoulishness he was sure to find in the next series of papers assigned to the cadets.

Forensics had been nice, he thought wistfully. He missed working in forensics. He'd liked working in forensics. For three years he'd been the only vampire there, and he still wasn't sure if anyone had ever noticed. The people who worked nights by choice were all a bit weird and he'd fit right in with John, who would only eat foods that had been cut into a square; Karena, who had the most horrifically inappropriate, morbid sense of humour; Danny, who had a girlfriend no one had seen and everyone suspected might be a sex doll; Emily, who almost never spoke. And himself, Will Graham, who wouldn't look anyone in the eye, who didn't like to be touched.

Now everyone knew about his condition - his ability to profile had only been exacerbated by the vampirism. He was the profiler who could practically read minds. The vampire who could see into your soul and read your past.

Now he was supposed to teach his technique.

How he was supposed to teach something that he could do because he was a freak of nature Will wasn't sure, but the cadets seemed to think passing his class was some sort of a rite of passage.

It was possible he'd cultivated his reputation a little bit. No one had ever shown up for office hours. He was proud of that.

"The third and final victim of this sounder was Horace Gardiner," Will said. He pushed his remote and the next slide came up: a recent family snapshot of a young-looking couple. "The woman is his wife and sire, Jane Gardiner, who reported him missing after he failed to return to their house before sunrise. Three days later he was found in a textiles factory by the morning shift. He'd been flayed and the skin strips were used to make a suit, which he was wearing."

The next slide would have been bloodier, if Horace Gardiner had had any blood left in his body.

"Forensics determined Mr Gardiner was killed less than forty-eight hours after his abduction; the same as the other two victims, and the victims of the previous sounders. There were the usual specs on Van Helsing - surgical skills, sadist, lousy sense of humour, high IQ - but nothing else. Nothing to suggest one way or the other if he is human or vampire which makes putting together a profile more difficult."

Will made the mistake of glancing up and saw Jack Crawford lurking at the back of the lecture hall. Jack lifted his chin in something like a nod and Will pretended he hadn't seen anything.

He saw everything: Jack was tired, he was excited about something. There was a lead on one of his cases. Something was wrong with his wife but she wouldn't tell him. Maybe she was having an affair. Maybe this was the break in the case he had been looking for, if only he could get Graham in on it, Jesus he hated having to persuade people to do their goddamn jobs...

Will fumbled with the papers on his desk for a moment, trying to pick up his own train of thought.

Will rubbed at his eyes, hand pushed up under his glasses. His head was pounding. "What's notable about the Van Helsing murders is how careful he is not to kill his victims. At least, not until the time of his choosing. Some things that are fatal to vampires are also fatal to most everything else: immolation, a wooden stake through the heart, beheading. However, things that are fatal to humans are not always fatal to vampires, which allows Van Helsing to torture his victims for as long as he pleases. Mr Gardiner was flayed alive but COD is obscured by the organ removal.

"Until they are displayed, most of the time the BAU doesn't even know these people are missing - it goes through Missing Persons, not us. Because his victims are vampires, sometimes they aren't even reported as missing. So why doesn't Van Helsing keep his victims longer? I want at least two-thousand words outlining your theories on my desk by Friday, class dismissed."

The cadets began stuffing laptops and notepads into their bags, eager to get to their dinners and their beds. Will had enough migraines, he didn't need to face daylight for any amount of time. He taught when it was full dark, and only then. It meant anyone who wanted, or was required, to take one of his classes had to show up after sunset. Not so bad in the winter months, but still.

He started putting his papers back into his bag and did his very best to pretend he couldn't see Jack Crawford moving through the students who parted around him like water around a prophet. A file dropped down on the desk in front of Will, fucking up his paperwork.

"I want you on this," Jack said, without preamble. "Homicide, male, Caucasian, dead."

Will looked wistfully at the exit sign above the door and didn't stab a pencil into his own heart in order to end his misery. "Pretty sure dead's a requirement for a homicide case, Jack. That's why it's called homicide, and not breaking and entering." All his pencils were mechanical ones anyway.

"I mean the victim's one of you."

"Hicks from the shitty part of Biloxi, sir?"

"Don't be a wise-ass, Will. The victim's a vampire. Four victims so far, all vampires, young ones."

Will flipped open the file. "Shit," he said. "But Van Helsing just ended his cycle." It only took a moment before he realized his error.

Van Helsing was a sadist who enjoyed torturing his victims. He was hands-on. The wounds Will was looking at were all self-inflicted. This new killer had glamoured four vampires into torturing themselves to death. The amount of mental ability to push past the innate sense of self-preservation would be phenomenal. He hadn't known you could glamour vampires. What a mess. He shut his eyes, headache pounding at the base of his skull, in his temples.

"That's just it," Jack said. "It's someone new. They're calling him the Invisible Man."

"What?" Will said, rubbing his forehead. "There are witnesses?"

Jack gave him a funny look and Will tracked their conversation back.

"You have to have eye contact to glamour someone," Will said, although he wasn't entirely certain of that now. "So that means the killer, this Invisible Man, was right there. If people are calling him invisible, that means no one saw him, but implies that some third party was there and ought to have seen him."

"Yeah," Jack said. He seemed slightly more comfortable when Will explained his train of thought. "There have been witnesses at each scene, but they've been glamoured too, and while they can describe what happened, they can't describe the killer. I'm getting jammed up on both sides. Everyone wants him caught, but no one wants to talk to the FBI."

"No one wants to talk to humans, you mean," Will said, distracted. He had to stop looking at the pictures. He'd developed a few coping strategies since he'd been turned and it was taking all his attention not to fall into the scene and lose himself to the visions of the past.

Instead, he was concentrating on the stream in his mind. It used to keep the ghosts at bay. Not anymore.

"This isn't my area of expertise," he said, closing the folder.

Jack spoke like a man moving his pieces into check. "We have the forensic profile. The vampire would have to be at least three hundred years old - probably closer to five hundred at a minimum. There are a finite number of vampires over three hundred and we have intel that most of them are all gathering in one place. I need your help, Will," Jack said. "I need you to be my inside man on this one."

The river, Will's river, his safe place, was running red with blood and all the fish had sharp teeth. Will pushed the file back across the desk to Jack. "One, I'm not even a hundred. Two,

vampires are all about pedigree and I don't have any. There isn't a chance in hell they'll let me even know where the damn thing is being held."

He regretted that particular argument almost immediately. Jack's face took on a smug cast and Will had the sinking feeling he'd just been put into checkmate.

"What do you know about Hannibal Lecter?" Jack asked.

Jack had aged in the years Will had known him. If Will had been aging right alongside him he probably wouldn't have noticed. But without that same progression he could see so clearly that one day Jack wasn't going to be there anymore. Will felt a strange sense of vertigo, like the ground was opening up under him. He'd always been solitary but the future unrolled before him and there was nothing, nothing at all in it.

"Who?" Will said, faintly.

Jack flipped through the file he'd given Will and came up with a photograph taken from the society section of the paper. The picture was of three people - two men, both in their late forties, early fifties, and a woman in her late thirties. Will recognised the woman as Alana Bloom. There was a scientific article stapled to it. Someone had written out an address and there was a phone number at the top of the paper in Alana's handwriting.

"Hannibal Lecter," Jack said, tapping the picture. "He's a big name in these parts, if you know who to ask. He has an invitation and he's agreed to meet you and maybe, as a favour to the FBI, take you along as his plus one."

In Will's experience, you did not do favours for the FBI. You did as you were told.

"He's got to be pretty heavy if you're phrasing it like that, Jack," Will said.

Hannibal Lecter - in the black and white of the photograph - was nothing special. He had a nice tux. He had an unremarkable haircut. He was clearly paying attention to Alana Bloom and not to the person taking his picture. While most men in the society papers made sure their watches were visible, Hannibal Lecter didn't wear one at all.

"How old is he?" Will asked.

"Old enough."

It meant Jack didn't know. That wasn't great news either.

"We need his cooperation and the only reason we even got an interview was because Alana Bloom opened that particular door for us. Apparently he was her mentor."

Will frowned. "Alana Bloom isn't a vampire."

"No, but apparently she's friends with one and that vampire likes her enough to meet with you. God knows what she said to him," Jack muttered. Will tried not to feel insulted and mostly managed it. "He's the one who tipped us to the gathering being in America. That's about all

we've got. They're meeting in our jurisdiction so we've got one shot at this. If you piss Lecter off and he decides to fuck us, he could bring the whole operation down."

"So don't piss him off?" Will said. "I'm not promising anything." He gathered his papers and sighed. "Did he reach out to you? Because if he did, that makes him a pretty key suspect."

Jack patted him on the shoulder. "Lecter alibied out. Witnesses put him at public gatherings in Baltimore while two of the murders happened in Philadelphia and Chicago. Don't worry. He's totally safe."

"Yeah," Will said. "Sure."

He dallied as long as possible at Quantico trying to think of some way to get out of the assignment, and then got in his beater and headed out. It didn't take him long to drive to the address Jack had given him but by the time he got there it was nearly midnight, Will was hungry, and his head was pounding.

After he had been turned he'd gone to see a doctor and been told that vampires didn't get headaches. Will had told the doctor he was an idiot and left.

If anything Will's headaches were worse than when he was human. It was hard for him to meet anyone's eye without losing himself, and the mental acrobatics he had to perform to remain grounded in reality made his head feel like it was going to crack open. He wished Aspirin still worked.

Hannibal Lecter's house was huge, with a surprisingly large number of windows. Will dithered over bringing his satchel or leaving it in his car, and eventually just walked up, empty handed, and rang the bell. Hannibal opened the door a few moments later, and was not at all what Will had been expecting. He wasn't really sure what he had been expecting, but Hannibal wasn't it. There was a peculiar stillness to Hannibal. When he moved, it was like a statue coming to life. There was weight to his presence, a gravity, that Will hadn't counted on.

"You must be Will Graham," Hannibal said. He had an eastern European accent, and was wearing one hell of a suit.

Some vampires, Will had noticed, got a little bit stuck in the decade they had died, in terms of what they wore. Some just liked to affect an older look. Hannibal was wearing a plaid suit with a paisley tie in a colour combination that hadn't been in vogue since the Victorian era, before Albert died.

If Hannibal had an invitation to the gathering then he had to be at least three hundred years old and there was no way he'd been turned in the Victorian era. So either he really liked the years when it was acceptable to wear paisley and plaid together, or he was content to let people underestimate his age.

Will realized he was just kind of staring at Hannibal's tie. "Hi," he said and stuck out a hand, awkward.

"Traditional etiquette states that you may shake hands with humans, if you must, but not with another of our kind," Hannibal said, matter-of-factly. If he had any opinion on Will's inability

to look him in the eye, he didn't voice it.

He sounded more like he was trying to gently avoid a social faux-pas than trying to reprimand Will, but shame crawled up the back of Will's throat, thick and choking, like the old days of being poor and southern in the rich north: not knowing what the right thing to do, or say was, and always getting it wrong.

Will shoved his hands into his pockets. "It was good of you to offer to help the FBI but I know more about the secret language of Russian prison tattoos than I do about vampire high society. I'm sure someone more presentable-"

"I suspect that is why Agent Crawford wishes us to work together," Hannibal said, smoothly cutting him off. "You have a great many details of the crime he wishes us to solve, and I have a great many details about the people you will need to profile and the means to move comfortably among them." Hannibal stepped to the side so Will could pass him. "Let's see if we can work together before we abandon the idea entirely. Please, come in."

The inside of the house was no less imposing than the outside. There were mirrors and fresh cut flowers but the mirrors had oppressive gilt frames, and the flowers were dark and intertwined with sharp twigs and bone. The art on the walls was strange, cultured but unsettling. Perhaps once Hannibal had bothered pretending to be something he wasn't. That certainly wasn't the case anymore. Will realized Hannibal's extraordinary stillness was because he only breathed when he needed to speak.

Even though Will's heart didn't beat and he sure as hell didn't need the oxygen, he still breathed. He had never met a vampire who didn't. It was a habit - an autonomic reflex - that was hard to shake. Of course, the only vampires Will had ever met were young, either in line for blood supplies, or in police custody for one reason or another.

He followed Hannibal through his house into his living room. Despite the decor, the room was comfortable, book shelves lined the walls, and there was a fire in the hearth. Hannibal steered Will to a chair that ought to have been in a museum somewhere, but felt good to sit on, like it was meant to be used.

"Would you care for some wine?" Hannibal asked, pausing by a sideboard.

Will's eyebrows went up. "I don't drink...wine," he said. Hannibal nodded as though that was an answer. "That was from a film," Will blurted out. "We...We *can't*."

"Can we not?" Hannibal said. There was a bottle of wine breathing, waiting. The wine looked an awful lot like blood to Will, but he accepted the glass Hannibal poured for him.

"Slowly," Hannibal said, sitting in the matching chair across from Will. "It has been many years since you last partook, has it not?"

"I died, uh, changed, about ten years ago," Will said. "Haven't had a drink since then so, yeah. Longest in my life." His father had given him his first sip of beer when he was just a kid. First real taste of blood had been in the hospital. He'd thrown the first bag of blood at the idiot who had been his vampire parole liaison and Will was still smugly proud that he'd managed to hit

the guy. It had taken him two days to give in and accept his new diet, and by that point he'd been so hungry he'd been about ready to drink his own blood.

He swirled the liquid in the glass and tasted it. It tasted like wine but a hundred, thousand times better. He tried not to let the expression of fervent gratitude show on his face. After so many years of pre-packaged animal blood, it was pretty much the best thing he'd ever tasted. He forced himself to sip and not gulp.

"Thank you," he said, then, "Isn't having all the old, important vampires in one place kind of an insane idea?"

Hannibal crossed his legs. The suit made him look heavier than he actually was, Will noted idly. Hannibal had slim hips and long legs but the suit pattern distracted from that. "This is only the North American gathering and it only takes place every fifty years, give or take. A more international gathering takes place every, oh, three hundred years or so. You are quite right. That many...personalities in one space can become problematic. However, the purpose of such a gathering is threefold. We gather to take attendance; see who of import is newly arrived on the continent, who is still here, and who is still alive-"

"I thought we were immortal."

"Perhaps," Hannibal said. "I have yet to hear of any vampire dying of natural causes, but that is because eventually they are killed, or they take their own lives."

It was so close to what Will had been thinking about at Quantico that he nearly flinched. Yeah, he wasn't surprised that most vampires killed themselves.

"The second reason is so that grievances may be aired. Some things are best said in a room with impartial bystanders. And finally," Hannibal said, sipping from his own glass, "everyone gets lonely. It's an excuse to socialize."

The wine warming Will's stomach made him feel bold. "Why would you help the FBI?" he asked. "Really."

"Really?" Hannibal said. "I was curious about the young man who had so caught the attention of Doctor Bloom."

"Oh god," Will said. "What did she say about me?"

Hannibal set his glass down, leaning forward slightly. "Only that you were gifted as a human, and extraordinary as a vampire, and that you had no one in your life to introduce you to your new circumstances. I'm a psychiatrist."

Will closed his eyes. "You're kidding me."

"I'm afraid not," Hannibal said. Will opened his eyes again, but he didn't need to be looking to know Hannibal was smiling. "I have a twentieth century medical degree. I find earned titles preferable to hereditary ones."

"You have a hereditary title, don't you," Will said flatly. He wasn't going to touch the whole gifted and extraordinary thing with a ten foot pole and Hannibal seemed content to let it go.

"I rarely use it," Hannibal said. " I'm a count and even I can't cope with the irony."

It startled a laugh out of Will. "That is unfortunate."

Hannibal shrugged a little, the very picture of 'c'est la vie.' "Happily, I am also a doctor and needn't embarrass myself." Hannibal gently swirled the wine in his glass. "Professional interest aside, I was compelled to meet you. Empathy is something greatly lacking amongst our kind, Will. Especially among those made before the turn of the - I beg your pardon - the turn of last century. I had to at least meet the man who so easily wears the skins of others."

"You must be so bored," Will said and met Hannibal's eyes. They were brown, maybe, but they shone red and black in the firelight. It was like looking at a statue until Hannibal blinked. The blink spoke volumes to him. Hannibal disliked it when people were rude, and though Will trod the line between rudeness and blunt honesty he found it somehow refreshing.

It occurred to Will that he was not with a student, or a colleague, or even one of the few vampires he'd had the displeasure of meeting. Hannibal Lecter was old - it meant he'd survived, it meant he was dangerous, and likely he was very powerful as well. It was like realizing he had his head in the mouth of a lion and was poking it.

"I'm sorry," Will said, which wasn't something he bothered with most days. "That was rude."

Will hoped to God that Hannibal truly wasn't the killer they were looking for. That would just get ugly. He tried not to crack the glass he was clutching in his hand.

Hannibal broke their connection, blinking deliberately. Will stared at the rim of his glasses and gulped down a mouthful of wine. If Hannibal fit the killer's profile, Will fit the Invisible Man's victim profile. He reminded himself that Alana Bloom and Jack Crawford respected and trusted Hannibal.

From what little Will could see, Hannibal's expression didn't change but Will got the feeling he was amused. "I keep myself entertained," Hannibal said. "I have a working practice. And apparently I now consult for the FBI." Hannibal drummed the fingers of his other hand on the arm of the chair. "So many of our kind go into the sun because they can't face the relentless march of time. Curiosity, interest, these are the things that keep the blood flowing, so to speak. We must engage with our surroundings."

Will frowned into his wine. "Am I your 'surroundings?'"

Hannibal turned to look at the fire. His profile was striking and he sat so perfectly still before he came to life again and said, "You are unique and I find myself curious. I will help with your investigation, provide you entry to the gathering, and introduce you to the right people, so long as you let me teach you the culture and traditions we have. I have no interest in making a childer, but mentoring others brings me great satisfaction."

There was, Will realized, no getting out of it. Jack wanted him to go, Hannibal Lecter wanted him to go. The only person who didn't want Will to hang around a bunch of high-class

vampires was Will himself. And no one really seemed to think that mattered.

"Tell me a little about yourself," Hannibal prompted. He smiled without showing any of his teeth. "Jack Crawford tells me you have no sire."

Jack was a horrible gossip, Will thought. "Everyone has a sire," Will said. "But two PCP crazed vampires ripped out my throat while my partner shot them to pieces. Not sure which of them was my sire. Both were put to the true death anyhow."

"I imagine your education consisted primarily of integrating back into society."

"Pretty much." Will finished his wine and Hannibal got up to pour him another glass.

The few vampires Will had met just smelled of their surroundings and the things they touched, but Hannibal was much closer than they had ever been, and now Will could smell blood - different from human blood. Hannibal smelled of history, of the density of years. Also very expensive cologne.

Will accepted the wine, turning his head away slightly before his headache could come back. He got them from bright lights, from too-strong smells, from trying not to read people. "I got a case worker, a few 'I'm a Vampire, Now What?' pamphlets, and weekly probation meetings to make sure I wasn't going on any killing sprees."

Hannibal's upper lip curled into the subtlest of sneers. "How..."

"Bureaucratic?"

"That's one word for it," Hannibal said. "You have trouble with eye contact, do you not?"

Will shrugged and didn't meet Hannibal's eyes. "I get lost," he said. "You know, you change and smells are sharper, your eyesight's better, you can run faster, jump higher. Everything gets enhanced. Well I had an empathy disorder before I was changed. Too many mirror neurons, apparently. That got amplified too."

Hannibal set the wine bottle down. "Give me your hand," he said, still standing very close to Will. "Please."

Will, unsure of what Hannibal wanted since handshakes were verboten, lifted his hand hesitantly. Hannibal took hold of his wrist and the back of his hand, palm up, and brought the inside of Will's wrist to his nose. He inhaled deeply, so close his lips brushed over the skin. Will went to jerk his hand back and found he couldn't. Hannibal's grip was like a vice.

"Jesus," Will said, shrinking back when Hannibal let go. It felt like all the hair on his body was standing on end. "But shaking hands isn't okay? What the hell were you smelling me for?"

"It's the reason we don't shake hands," Hannibal said. "So much can be revealed by scent, or by touch. You may tell Jack Crawford that I will work with you."

Will scrubbed his hand on his jeans. "Right," he said. "Great." He wanted to know what Hannibal could read from him but Will decided discretion was the better part of valour and didn't ask. He had the feeling that there were going to be a lot of things he wouldn't ask about, because the answer was probably going to be weird and awful. "So where are we going? When are we going? And what do I need to bring?"

A Chilly Reception

"Alaska," Will said as he followed Hannibal down the steps of the private plane. "Makes sense."

The sky was a strange, deep blue and the moon glowed brightly even though it was daytime. Hannibal handed Will a pair of sunglasses which Will took gratefully. Hannibal, the bastard, wasn't even squinting. He turned his face up to the sky, one hand casually in his pocket and the very corners of his eyes crinkled in satisfaction. Will already felt burned and chapped and there wasn't even any direct sun.

"Last time the meeting was in Svalbard," Hannibal said. "But the time before that was in Azerbaijan. If we always stayed within the Arctic Circle we'd be too predictable."

The flat light made the ground look treacherously smooth. Snow skated by in swirls and eddies and Will's hair, recently cut, did its best to escape its styling. Hannibal reached out absently and thumbed a curl back into place. For a man who wouldn't shake hands with anyone because of vampire tradition he was certainly hands-on with Will's body, and those hands were on in a casual, proprietary way that Will wasn't sure he liked.

He knew he didn't like that Hannibal had told him in no uncertain terms that his input on his own wardrobe wouldn't be required. He'd been sent to a tailor and to a barber, and two weeks (and another dead vampire) later he was sitting on a private plane with Hannibal in a suit that felt too snug across the shoulders and new underwear he'd had to buy because his suit pants were way tighter than he was used to.

Hannibal was wearing a coat but it wasn't nearly warm enough for the sub-zero temperatures, and it was entirely for show. Will only had his suit jacket. Had he been human the wind would have cut right through him and within moments he'd be hypothermic. As it was, his socks were getting wet. Annoying, but not intolerable.

It was strange, still, to stand in the cold and not to feel it. The heat didn't bother him, the arctic cold didn't bother him. It was one of the few benefits Will had found about being a vampire.

Hannibal watched with a critical eye as porters unloaded trunks and bags from the plane and onto a luggage cart. The porters were all wearing heavy parkas and other winter gear. They were in the middle of nowhere but you'd never have guessed it for all the structures that had been temporarily erected and the bustle of so many people.

"Most of these people are human," Will said looking around. "Isn't that a massive security problem?"

Hannibal raised his voice over the sound of an incoming plane. "Not as much as it would be if they were young vampires. These humans are either part of a retinue or thoroughly vetted. Humans can be controlled far more easily than the newly changed. Most of them are probably under a mild glamour."

Will wasn't sure if that was an insult, a compliment, or not intended to apply to him. He knew he didn't like the idea of glamoured humans, zombie servants, Renfields in the common vernacular. Whatever they were called, he didn't like it.

Will startled a little when Hannibal touched the small of his back but let himself be escorted. Maybe it was the layers of clothing between them, or maybe it was something else, but it didn't hurt when Hannibal touched him. It was like the way Hannibal looked at him: not painful, not invasive like it was with other people, but something new and strange. Hannibal was a calm, quiet place when everyone else felt like a hurricane. He wanted to cling to it, which, conversely, made him want to run like hell.

If Hannibal could feel his indecision, or if he could smell Will's conflicting opinions, he gave no indication of it. They crossed the frozen ground and entered a long wooden building that looked like it had been stolen from one of the quainter Swiss or German hamlets. Someone had gone a little overboard with the woodworking.

Hannibal held the door for Will and Will bit back his instinct to snap at him.

Humans stepped aside for them as they crossed the lobby. The entire thing was one giant reception area, complete with check-in clerks, low couches and chairs around glass end tables. The place was heated, but Will thought it was likely they'd done that so the paintings, flowers, carpets and sundry wouldn't be damaged by the cold.

The patrons were mostly vampires, age pressing in at his senses. They radiated power and stank of blood. So far as Will could tell, he was the youngest vampire in the room.

Will could hear people speaking French, Italian, Arabic, Farsi, Mandarin...possibly Latin, and those were only the languages he could name off the top of his head. The volume of the room was steadily climbing as more people appeared and began to mingle. Or maybe it was just one of Will's headaches starting up.

Some of the humans lowered their heads with deference as Hannibal and Will crossed the foyer. All of them avoided eye contact. Hannibal leaned one elbow on the check-in counter and regarded the room instead of the clerk behind the desk. Another human.

"Hannibal Lecter," he said and Will could hear the clerk's fingernails rattling over the keys of her computer.

"Welcome, Count Lecter," the clerk said. "I have here that you're travelling with a companion but without a retinue?" She glanced up at Will, curious, and then lowered her eyes again deferentially. Fear, too. She was afraid of them both the same as any human would be in a room with a tame tiger: Sensibly afraid.

"That is correct," Hannibal said. "However it's doctor, not count."

The woman's fingernails clattered again. "I'm very sorry Doctor Lecter, I'll have that fixed right away. Do you have any special requirements for your companion?" There was a tone to the way she said companion that Will wasn't sure he liked.

"No, thank you," Hannibal said.

A bird-boned woman with a severe bob and a dress that was probably from the 1920s was the first person to really meet Will's eyes. He could feel her dismiss him until she noticed who he was with, and then she was walking briskly towards them, a gaggle of flunkies trailing after her.

Will lowered his voice so only Hannibal could hear him. "What," Will said, "exactly, does 'companion' mean to other vampires?"

The woman reached them before Hannibal could answer.

"Hannibal Lecter," she said. "How good it is to see you."

"Elianna," Hannibal said, genuine pleasure in his voice. "Please, let me introduce you to my companion, Will Graham. Will, this is Lady Komeda."

Her open assessment didn't feel especially invasive but he still avoided directly meeting her eyes. He could hear her indrawn breath and knew she was scenting him from a distance.

"He's so young," she said. "And so handsome. What a scandal you will cause."

"I'm thirty-seven," Will said and immediately regretted opening his mouth. Being turned in his twenties had not done him any favours, although he thought he had seen a few faces that looked younger than his. Maybe even a child, which was a disturbing thought.

Komeda didn't laugh, but her mouth twitched as though she was trying very hard to contain her mirth. "Where on earth did you find this treasure?"

Hannibal put his hand on Will's back again, this time over his quiescent heart. "A mutual acquaintance introduced us. Will's change was not under the best of circumstances and you know how I feel about wasted potential."

She tutted disapprovingly. "The way some vampires go about making childers is just despicable. No thought to the responsibility. It oughtn't to be allowed."

"Will, Lady Komeda has been a cornerstone of Baltimore society for many years. She was the arbiter of the north-east until recently. How is the quiet life suiting you?"

Komeda rolled her eyes. "Is that what we're calling it? I have François on the phone at all hours making a royal muddle of a perfectly comprehensible archive system, Lene just created her first childer so that's my weekends filled for the foreseeable future, and Maria is courting that horrible woman Gerrard insists on bringing everywhere. Tanya, Tonya, Terry, I'm sure I don't know."

"You're enjoying yourself then?" Hannibal said.

"Immensely," she said with great satisfaction. "I've missed all the talk that doesn't relate to who intruded on whose territory and what imbecile poached what human. It's ghastly, you'll have to throw one of your parties and fill me in on everything I've neglected."

Hannibal inclined his head in agreement. "A belated celebration of your retirement from office," he said.

"Nonsense," Komeda said. "In honour of your young man that you've finally stopped hiding away." One of her humans came close enough to whisper in her ear. "Well," she said, "duty calls." She leaned in like any socialite and kissed the air next to Hannibal's cheek. "Don't let him walk all over you, Hannibal. I know how you get around the pretty ones." Komeda fluttered a hand in a farewell and was gone.

The clerk put two programmes on the desk, clearing her throat to catch their attention. "Here you are, Doctor Lecter. You're in cabin eight. Please enjoy your stay with us."

Hannibal nodded his thanks, took the programmes and headed for the door again. Will trailed after him, the porters already gone to their destinations.

"She got awfully close," Will pointed out.

"We have enough history that our personal space boundaries are closer than they are with others. Elianna was kind enough to bring me under her wing when I arrived in Baltimore with no connections to any local bloodline."

"I take it that's important," Will said as they stepped back out into the snow.

"We choose our own kin and companions," Hannibal said. The wind whipped his hair out of place and skated more snow over the edges of Will's shoes. "So often alliances are simply a product of being able to sit in a room with another vampire without wanting to murder each other. Most territories are home to only one major clan or bloodline. I am unusual in that regard."

Hannibal stopped in front of the little wooden cabin with the number eight on the door. There was no lock but without installing industrial strength electromagnets and vault safes, there was no way to set up a decent security system to keep vampires out.

"A truce provides privacy for the duration of the gathering," Hannibal explained, as he held the door for Will. "The life of anyone who breaks it is forfeit, as are the lives of all their childers and vassals. Just because a door is open does not mean you should enter. I don't recommend wandering around."

The cabin was exactly as ornate and pretentious as Will had expected. Apart from the entryway, Will could see a receiving area filled with antique chairs and fragile-looking end tables. There were blank spaces on the wall for paintings and empty plinths where busts or sculpture ought to stand. The effect was somewhat ruined by the large packing crates that Hannibal had brought with him.

Through another door, Will caught a glimpse of a little kitchen and a third door lead to the bedroom and a four poster bed, complete with curtains and too many pillows. He wasn't exactly surprised that there was only the one. Something about the way the desk clerk had asked if Hannibal had any "special requirements," for his companion made Will fairly certain he didn't want to know what other sleeping arrangements were on offer. The whole place already looked like the set of an over-budgeted, medieval bodice ripper.

Will frowned. "What exactly does 'companion' mean to other vampires?" he asked. "You never did say."

"Take your shoes off, please." Hannibal toed his brogues off and hung his coat up on the rack waiting there.

"*Hannibal*!" Will said.

Hannibal held up his hands, waiting, until Will turned around and let Hannibal help him out of his damp suit jacket. "That you are my companion means that you are not my childer, nor are you part of the linage of my sires. However, it means you are under my protection and I am responsible for you as though you were my progeny. Generally it is a bond between an older vampire and one only recently through the change, such as it was in ancient Greece between the erastes and eromenos."

Will's socks were soaked through so he pulled those off as well and left them by the door. "Uh-huh," he said taking a circuit around the rooms. "Because everyone's looking at me like you brought a low-rent hooker to dinner with the President."

Hannibal frowned at him. "It does not always mean a sexual relationship."

"Not always?" Will said with great skepticism, eyeing the bed.

His over-developed perception began to pick apart the room. The fact that the bed was at exactly the right height to get bent over; discreetly placed eye-rings bolted into the walls and floors. He supposed that after hundreds of years people got a little kinky.

"Not always," Hannibal said firmly. He began opening up the trunks and boxes that had been brought to their accommodations. It was a lot of stuff for a few days. "Although, people are going to assume that we are lovers unless we disabuse them of that idea."

Will sighed. "Yeah, but then we'd have to explain why you took me on."

"No one will ask for details if we say nothing," Hannibal allowed. "It would be gauche to do more than raise eyebrows and gossip mercilessly behind my back. You are handsome and interesting, I don't feel as though my reputation will suffer from the insinuation. And I assure you, I am established enough that neither will yours."

"It's not that." Will said, although he privately doubted that Hannibal's reputation wouldn't take a hit or two. With the nice suits Hannibal had provided for him Will was confident enough that he'd look acceptable, but there wasn't enough tailoring in the world to disguise the sack of rabid wolverines that was his brain.

Hannibal pried open a large crate. He should have needed a crowbar. He didn't. The casual display of strength reminded Will that Hannibal was not simply the eccentric he appeared. He was a nightmare made real. They both were.

Will had to turn away, rubbing his chest as though it would restart his heart. He didn't think he could stand to fake the closeness that other people would assume they had. He hadn't been close with anyone in so long. He wanted to go home. He wanted to be human again.

"There is no need to be overly familiar. Certainly I wouldn't wish to make you uncomfortable," Hannibal said, breaking the silence. "I understand you are sensitive to these things."

Will swallowed back his depression. He was what he was, and nothing could be done about it. "Aren't we all," he asked rhetorically, coming over to see what was in the crate.

Will could see picture frames and sure enough Hannibal pulled out a series of portraits, which he hung with great care in the spaces thoughtfully left empty on the walls. There was a second crate marked heavily with the word FRAGILE and inside were two polished stone busts and a death mask.

"Not at all," Hannibal said. "There is a list of things that are enhanced in us all, but any gift is usually magnified to the extreme. I myself have always had an exceptional sense of smell. Now I can tell almost everything about a vampire or human - age, health, where they have been, what they have eaten - without touching them. When I first changed I found it overwhelming to the point of pain. Your ability to empathize and mirror others must be extremely painful now. I would not wish to cause you greater discomfort. Tell me, Will, has anyone helped you learn to control it?"

"It's not something I can turn on and off," Will said. "Never has been." Melting snow dripped from his hair, trickled down the back of his neck, and soaked slowly into his collar. He didn't look at Hannibal, didn't want to see what he was thinking. Instead, Will examined the portraits in front of him.

One of the paintings was clearly more recent than the others. It looked Tudor-era, not that Will was any great art historian. That was about as far as he could figure. Hannibal put it on the wall with great care and stood back to look at it with a strange sort of fondness.

The man in the portrait appeared to be in his early twenties. He was beautiful; dark skin, dark hair and moustaches, finely boned features, and eyes so blue he almost looked blind. The artist had captured the details of his long eyelashes, his sharpened nails painted with lacquer, and the suggestion of a cruel slant to his bow lips. There was an intimacy to the piece.

"Good looking guy," Will said. It was as obvious a conversation shift as any other.

"My sire," Hannibal said. "Khirad was born in Pārsa, now Iran, before Rome fell, before Alexander the Great invaded. He was a prince of the Achaemenid Empire. This was painted much later, obviously."

"Is he still around?" Will asked. There was no artist signature anywhere and it occurred to Will that Hannibal had painted it himself.

"Alas," Hannibal said, "no. He went into the sun, which, incidentally, is important. Since I am the eldest of my line I am addressed by my title. You will refer to me as Doctor Lecter when speaking to others, but you may call me Hannibal. You'll find most households operate the same, the eldest addressed by their preferred title and last name, the second by their title and first name, then just first names after that. However, as you are my companion, not my childer, you will be addressed by your own name."

It made sense, in a Regency novel sort of way. Will tugged uncomfortably at his tie. He couldn't actually be strangled to death any more, but it felt as though the tie might manage the impossible. "No shaking hands," Will said wryly. "Anything else I should know, so I don't wind up in a duel?"

"No one should try to touch you," Hannibal said, arranging the other art pieces around the room. "To do so is to offer insult to me. We may touch one another freely. Don't agree to anything without running it past me first. Don't drink from a human under anyone's protection. Don't use the fish fork with steak."

Will looked up and realized Hannibal was actually making a joke. He felt his own mouth pull into a smile. Will wasn't sure when he'd smiled last and it unnerved him. He stared resolutely at the portrait. "So your sire was young. Young-looking," he amended. "Is he what Lady Komeda was talking about when she mentioned letting, uh...pretty men walk all over you?"

"Perhaps," Hannibal said, which sounded a lot like 'yes.'

"If he was your sire, who are all these other people?" Will asked, examining a bust of a woman with carefully carved facial tattoos.

"I can trace my linage back to the 15th century BC," Hannibal said. "My sire, and his sire, and her sire before her...Vampires lived a lot longer back then, when the whole world was less civilized. There were more of us also. The whole mythology of vampire nests is not untrue." He lifted one of the busts up onto a plinth and made minute adjustments to its placement until he was satisfied. "Direct linage is used to establish rank amongst ourselves." He didn't sound as though he thought much of that system.

Hannibal didn't appear in any of the art. If he wasn't in any of the art, Will realized, no one would be able to figure out when he was turned. Some time, any time really, after Khirad. Alexander the Great was 300 something BC, Will remembered vaguely. So Hannibal could, in theory, be well over two-thousand years old. A chill that had nothing to do with the temperature crawled over Will's skin.

He had willingly walked into a place where any of the vampires could be ancient enough to display all sorts of powers that most people knew nothing about. One of them, at least, had mind control powers beyond anything Will had seen.

He got the sense that Hannibal's carefully tailored appearance and his cultivated reputation was more about keeping something in, than about keeping others out. It wasn't armour, it was a cage of his own making; easily shed. The locks were all on the inside.

"I'm guessing everyone brings out their family photos," Will said, past the tightness in his throat.

"Precisely," Hannibal said, obviously pleased with Will's deduction. "If you could get the clothing?"

Will wasn't sure why they needed so much stuff for so few days. Last time he got stuck out in the field he wore the same pants for four days straight and he wasn't the only one. There was

an impressively sized wardrobe so Will got started unpacking the shirts, vests, jackets, multiple tuxedos...Will sighed heavily.

Finished with adjusting all the art, Hannibal sat on the bed, propped up against the headboard, and examined the programme they had been given. "Ah, excellent," he said. "The airing of the grievances is first on the docket. Likely because of the fiasco last year." He flipped to the back of the booklet and then returned to where he was. "Finally got rid of Antonio as head of programming," he said. "It's about time."

Will hung up the last of the jackets as Hannibal spoke, mostly to himself. He couldn't imagine Hannibal talking to himself in the privacy of his own house though. Hannibal had said it himself, vampires get lonely. Maybe that was why he had agreed to take on a protégé - and Will suspected that he'd signed on for far more than one week - he'd been alone for too many years.

"Good place to profile," Will said. "Hearing what people are pissed about."

"Exactly," Hannibal said. "What are you looking for?"

Will paced the floor, thick carpeting soft under his bare feet. "The victims," he said, "they're like me. Newly changed, with absent sires, or equally young sires. The Invisible Man puts them under a glamour and makes them torture themselves to death."

"Like a child pulling the wings off a fly. Cruel because he can be."

Will shook his head. "No, well, yes. That's not it. Sadism is a part of it, but there's something else. There's a message and I can't see it. I never got to see any of the crime scenes fresh, just photographs."

Hannibal leaned forward, curious. "That makes a difference to you?"

"Of course it does," Will said. "The shades of the dead remain visible for me. I walk in the bloody footprints of murderers, I cast their shadows." He slumped a little. "Photographs are evidence. There's no spirit left. It's harder. Not impossible but I prefer the real thing. If prefer is the right word."

Hannibal wet his bottom lip, like a snake tasting the air. "If this killer wanted to watch people die why not simply glamour humans? Why not do it himself?"

"I don't know," Will said. "Power. It makes him feel powerful that his mind has greater strength than theirs. Or maybe he's not physically strong so he has to glamour his victims. I don't have enough information yet. Are you bringing up any grievances?"

Hannibal got off the bed, leaving the programme on the covers. "If no one else does, I'll mention Van Helsing. He operates within the territory in which I live."

"FBI's on him," Will said, watching Hannibal peruse their clothing selection.

"Some things are better handled in-house," Hannibal said. He paused and then said, curious, "Are you on him?" He selected a grey suit and steel blue shirt, and laid it on the bed. "Wear

this, please."

Will wanted to protest that what he was wearing was perfectly fine, but it was damp from the snow and it was wrinkled from the flight. "Yeah," he said, unbuttoning his shirt, "I'm on the team. But it's hard to profile someone when you get less than nothing from the vampire community about who the victims were and what sort of shit they were into."

Hannibal raised a pale eyebrow. "I imagine that's very frustrating. Perhaps you will be able to acquire more information about that case also."

Will shrugged out of his shirt and nearly jumped out of his skin when Hannibal brushed his fingers over the absolute mess of scar tissue that covered the junction of his neck and shoulder, and his collarbone. Hannibal kept his hand where it was, surprisingly warm and unsurprisingly heavy. "They meant to kill you," he said.

"They did," Will said.

Hannibal rubbed his thumb over the scarring. "We call it the change because that's what it is, Will. Not a death. I am sorry no one has been there to show you how the world has opened for you. Your life is not a curse, not a mistake."

At that Will did pull away, shoulders rounding as he turned his back on Hannibal as if that could protect him. "A PCP fueled shootout," Will muttered. "Not a mistake at all." He put the new shirt on. "What about you?" he asked, a little desperately. "Were you and Khirad lovers? Is that why he turned you?"

Hannibal looped the tie he had chosen around Will's neck and deftly tied a knot before gesturing for Will to hold his wrist out so he could help Will with his French cuffs.

"There were times when we were sexually intimate, if that's what you mean, but we were not lovers. He would never have turned someone for so tawdry a reason."

Will met Hannibal's eyes. His gift, once a mirror, now cut like a scalpel, opening up the minds of others so he could climb inside. There was more now to what he could do than could be explained by mirror neurons and good profiling. Now his skills were amplified by something beyond science.

"But you loved him."

It wasn't a question. Hannibal had loved his sire. It had been complicated but Will could see it easily: Hannibal, younger, so much younger. The same face but still breathing, still human in his movements. He walked a step behind, at his sire's shoulder. Hannibal was barely contained violence, held back by his master's voice and nothing less would - nothing less *could* stop him.

Will saw Hannibal adrift. He was tied only to Khirad and everything around him was changing, confusing and often strange, and the only solid thing in the world was his sire who did not love him in return.

At one point in his life Hannibal had been very much alone.

Hannibal looked away first. Will wondered if he could feel his memories uncurling for Will to examine.

Hannibal picked up the jacket and held it for Will until Will turned around again and let Hannibal put it on him. He wasn't expecting Hannibal to give him anything else but Hannibal said, "Not at first, but before fifty years had passed, I loved him - passionately, desperately, and beyond reason - he made sure of that. But he enjoyed denying me things I wanted and he was not kind. Even rewards were often a case of 'be careful what you wish for.'"

Khirad kind of sounded like an asshole, in Will's opinion, but he wasn't a prince of the Achaemenid Empire, so what would he know.

"But when you di- when you changed. He was there for you then at least?"

Hannibal adjusted Will's collar and Will couldn't see his expression when he said, "No. Not for that. I was alone by choice. We had something of a difficult relationship. There." He came to stand in front of Will, running his hands down Will's chest and popping the bottom button of the suit jacket open. His picture in the paper had been nothing to write home about, but in person Hannibal was magnetic. Will clenched his teeth and held very still so he wouldn't press into Hannibal's touch.

"Now you look ready to walk into the lion's den," Hannibal said.

Will saw whole worlds in the quirk of Hannibal's mouth. "You're doing that so the others smell you on me," he said, looking at Hannibal's hands, sure of it.

"I am," Hannibal said, without shame. "We should eat before we go."

Will sighed. "Yeah, okay," he said, not remotely enthusiastic.

The skin around Hannibal's eyes creased when he smiled. "Of course," he said. "You've been drinking animal blood. Come, you enjoyed the wine, did you not?"

"That was human blood?" Will said, a little horrified.

He'd been told to avoid human blood for a multitude of reasons; there was no good, steady supply unless you had several donors; he'd been warned that it could trigger a homicidal rampage (though that one sounded a lot like scare mongering); if he never drank human blood, he wouldn't have any reason to feel like he was missing out on anything.

"Not straight," Hannibal said. "You may try that if you like, but I insist on it being fresh. For now, here."

Hannibal opened the bar fridge and removed a thermos of blood.

"Caffeine infused," he said, dropping in several ice cubes as though it was an iced coffee. From what he was saying, it probably was as close as Will was ever going to get.

Will sniffed it hesitantly as Hannibal watched him intently, without shame. Will put the cup to his lips and drank. Caffeine. He'd thought he'd never get that again. Here Hannibal was,

opening doors Will had thought were closed, and he wanted to give this to Will all the time.

"Oh," he said, helplessly. "Hannibal."

Hannibal's smile was predatory and Will found himself looking away. Shyly, coyly? Will wasn't even sure himself. He liked it though, the heavy weight of Hannibal's regard.

"You've let them lock you into a cage," Hannibal said. "Let me show you the way out of it." He reached out and thumbed a smudge of blood from Will's bottom lip and Will could only watch as he put his own lips to his finger and licked the blood off.

"We're going to be late," Will mumbled into the cup, unable to keep eye contact.

The Youth of Today

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will was expecting a big hall of some description. He hadn't seen anything the right size on the flight over but had assumed it had been hidden by the snow. Instead, the meeting space that had been prepared was set up outside: An amphitheatre had been made out of blocks of ice stacked in tiers and frozen together. The backdrop was an unbelievable view of the Northern Lights and an endless expanse of wilderness.

Hannibal surveyed the seating arrangements for a moment before guiding Will towards seats on the highest tier. It would give him a complete view of the room, no one could come up behind him without climbing sheet ice, and if he wanted to talk everyone would, quite literally, have to look up to him. Will was so used to reading into everyone's psychology that he couldn't tell if it was an obvious power play or a subtle one. He sat next to Hannibal without comment, a layer of cushioning on top of the ice to protect their clothing.

Every vampire that looked at Hannibal for some polite greeting wound up staring at him. Will felt himself crumbling under the torrent of information. Hundreds of years upon hundreds of years of information battered at him. He was reading decades of blood and death in everyone. The air was saturated with the after-images of their power.

He closed his eyes, trying desperately to get a grip on his own abilities. Next to him, Hannibal was a touchstone, a light in the storm. Will leaned against him, pressed from shoulder to hip. Hannibal took his hand and let Will clutch at him until the vertigo had passed.

He realised that Hannibal was breathing in and out, steady as a metronome, Will's own body matching the pace as his panic ebbed.

"Psychiatrist," Will said, releasing Hannibal from a grip that would have shattered bones in a human's hand, "right."

Hannibal quirked an eyebrow, chest stilling as he stopped the unnecessary breathing. "You need a focus," he said. "There is nothing wrong with you. We have time, take each person as they come."

A woman, hair covered by a red scarf, took the stage.

"Gentiana, the arbiter of these gatherings," Hannibal murmured to Will as she welcomed everyone and formally began the airing of grievances. "She is of Dardani's linage although he met the true death some years ago. Now she is head of her bloodline. Gentiana is about one thousand and three hundred years old. Well respected. I've known her many years. She is old-fashioned but not prone to cruelty."

Will stared at her shoes rather than risk catching her gaze. "There have been complaints about attendance," she said flatly and looked out at the crowd. Will could feel her attention pass over

him like a searchlight. "Several of you have expressed concerns about those allowed in retinues."

Hannibal gave the impression of having heaved a massive sigh without actually breathing at all. "Of course." He leaned in close enough that his mouth was almost touching Will's ear. "No one wants to travel alone, they want to show off their lineage, but at the same time no one wants anyone else's progeny in attendance."

It didn't take very many moments before a male vampire in an expensive suit stood, puffed up with anger.

"That is Claude, also first in his line. See how he holds himself. He moves whenever he forgets to hold himself still," Hannibal said. "He would have everyone believe that he offered God his opinion on dirt. He makes pretenses that he's nearly two thousand years old, but I knew his sire before she made him. He is no more than four hundred and change."

"Oh, only four hundred," Will said dryly. He made a mental note that Hannibal was, by his own admittance, older than that. "Why do the others let him get away with it?"

"His sire was a very private woman, even by our standards. Most of the vampires here have no idea when she made him. They know he's not a thousand years old, but they can't really prove otherwise."

"Does anyone here know how old you are?" Will asked.

Hannibal shushed him. "I need to hear this," he said.

"The rules regarding access to this august company are not being enforced," Claude was saying. His voice was querulous, reminiscent of any human complaining about the youth of today. "Times were that none but the most powerful and ageless of us all were invited. Now this place reeks of fledglings. Untried. Untested. Unlikely to survive."

"Times were," Hannibal said mildly, and yet still loud enough for everyone to hear, "we travelled in packs and lived like animals."

Will cringed a little under the attention that was directed his way as everyone turned to look up at Hannibal. No one expected Hannibal to show up with anyone, that was clear. Will was facing open hostility and was reminded again that most, if not all, of the other vampires could kill him with barely a passing thought.

Hannibal seemed unconcerned. "Times were we could have vassals and serfs and none would stand against us. We bled entire tribes dry. We walked the earth like gods. We were burned as witches and staked into graves. Women wear leggings and heels and not the men. The Black Death doesn't cull our prey. There are satellites and CCTV to track us. There are many things that are different. Everything changes."

"We do not," Claude snapped. "We are timeless."

Hannibal's mouth ticked up into a smile. "Nonsense," he said. "Where is Khirad? Where is Salewa, Rivka, or Johann? They are gone from us and so I am left to speak, so you are left to

speak."

A second vampire stood. She was a child, no more than ten or eleven. Someone had turned a child. Will felt a little sick to his stomach.

She rose to her feet with the same fluidity of movement that Hannibal had but her expression was as open and unreserved as Hannibal's was an impenetrable mask. She was angry. She was very angry. Will met her eyes and she wanted him dead, punished as an example. A vampire with a lineage as ancient and powerful as Hannibal's was to be preserved, cultivated. Instead he brought a creature scarcely more than human and for what? Will could feel her confusion and disappointment, but mostly black, suffocating rage.

"You will not honour your line but instead you bring that...That *base fledgling* into our heart and expect us to accept your judgement?" Her lip curled and Will could see the points of her fangs. "If you insist on slumming then at least do us the courtesy of keeping it to the privacy of your own territory."

Hannibal crossed one leg over the other and put his hand on Will's thigh. Higher, by an inch or two, than Will would have thought was necessary. Will tried not to squirm.

"I require neither your acceptance, nor am I desirous of your opinion. Will Graham is my companion and if anyone has a complaint about that, they may challenge me properly."

She snarled at him but sat down at another vampire's urging. They were lovers, Will saw. The vampire with the body of a child and her male companion who was fully adult. If Will had to guess he would have placed her as the elder of the two, but the feeling of revulsion wouldn't leave him. She looked like a child and who knew how vampirism affected the development of the brain.

Will ignored the churning in his stomach and fixed his attention on the meeting as a whole.

Hannibal sat like a king before a court, all the others twisted in their seats to look at him. "Disallowing our progeny to attend these meetings is foolish. The age restriction should stand for those allowed to speak, but how else will tradition survive? We live shorter lives. So few of the vampires born in the last three hundred years have lived long enough to attend. We must adapt with the changing times."

"We don't have to break with tradition to move forward," a woman said, standing. "Perhaps it would be wise to have a secondary meet where progeny might be allowed. That way the space here might-"

"That's absurd," another male vampire said. "We cannot risk so many gatherings. It's foolish to expect anything other than bloodshed."

At that point it devolved into too many people shouting to make their voices heard and no one was paying any attention to what anyone else was saying.

"Who's the child?" Will asked.

"Lady Amarantha?" Hannibal shifted his hand just enough to remind Will it was there, but didn't actually move it. "Second in her house, although I do not see her sire, Gemenanna. It is possible she is now first of her line. Amarantha is nearly three thousand years old but her line is weak. Too many children turned, not enough power in the blood.."

There was a vote, eventually, once the shouting had begun in earnest and Gentiana had to call the entire thing to order before blood was spilt. The motion to allow progeny passed, but not by much. It was agreed that further guidelines and rules would have to be prepared at a later date. Clans and households would send delegates to some central location. A parliament, Will thought.

Will took note of all those who voted against it. It was possible that they were killing young, or abandoned childers, but it was also possible that the Invisible Man would be smart enough to vote *for* progeny so as to throw off any suspicion.

They passed through several instances of land disputes, two counts of poaching - which drew unhappy mutters from the crowd - and three duels were declared. Hannibal continued to narrate, sotto voice, to him about the names and backgrounds of the vampires who stood to speak, but it all began to run together - one big blur of bloodlines and bloodfueds, childers and sires, companions and other relationships so complicated Will couldn't even begin to pick them apart.

"What about Van Helsing?" Lady Komeda said, when it sounded like everyone else was finished. "I understand that not one of us has brought forward any new information? How can we claim to be the elders, able to protect our own, if there is someone turning sire and childer alike into grotesque tableaus."

"He must be a human," another vampire spoke up. "There is organ removal, sometimes flesh, and not always blood. To what end would a vampire take organs?"

"If he was trying to make us think he is human," another said.

"Trophies," said another, but the others seemed to think that flesh and organs were poor trophies indeed. A sentiment that troubled Will. How many of them were murderers by modern standards and agreements? Hannibal squeezed Will's leg.

"Don't," Hannibal said, softly. "Let it go."

"So they're out killing people but they don't know squat about Van Helsing?"

Hannibal relaxed his grip. "You're here for the Invisible Man. Keep your focus."

It was no good though. The vampires had about as much of a clue as the FBI. Will was exhausted. His head felt like it was going to split open and he hadn't wanted to sleep so much since before he was turned.

"I'm heading to the room," he muttered, quiet so only Hannibal could hear him as soon as the proceedings were declared complete. He stood, trying to wave Hannibal away when he got up as well. "I can find my own way back. Stay, socialize."

Hannibal caught hold of his elbow. "I will walk you there," he said. "Tempers are high right now and there may be a killer present."

Will gave him an unimpressed glare and Hannibal blinked at him, slow and amused. "You know what I mean, darling," he said.

None too thrilled with the endearment, Will opened his mouth to protest when he caught sight of Komeda who was definitely within earshot of them. He slipped his hand under Hannibal's elbow and rested it on his arm.

"Will you stay or do you have other obligations to return to?" Hannibal was only an inch or two taller than him, but Will contrived to look up at him through his eyelashes.

Hannibal did a perfect impression of a man who suddenly ran out of things to say.

"My goodness," Komeda said, "no more than two seasons ago and Hannibal would have been happy to keep the progeny away from these events. Now here he is. You must be something very special indeed." There was a subtle threat to her words; she was protective of Hannibal and if Will was found to be unworthy - if he was the vampire equivalent of a gold-digger or a social climber - he would be very sorry indeed. She would see to that.

"He is." There was no note of lie in Hannibal's voice.

Will looked at him, startled. Either Hannibal was so good a liar that Will couldn't read him accurately, or he genuinely meant it. Will wasn't sure which was more disconcerting.

"I'm really not," Will said awkwardly. "Doctor Lecter is very kind."

Lady Komeda laughed at him. "Will Graham, you are a delight, don't let any of these old corpses tell you otherwise." She turned her attention to Hannibal. "An oculos configere te cum illis, cum futuit te? Quae scilicet ad videndum ea," she said.

Hannibal narrowed his eyes. "I don't believe I mentioned anything about any abilities."

"You know how vampires like to gossip," Komeda said. "Everyone already knows he has some sort of Sight."

Hannibal frowned.

"Oh don't be so stuffy, Hannibal," she said. "I promise, he's only looking at you. He thinks you're *kind*, bless his heart. Go, don't let me keep you both." She fluttered off before Hannibal could say whatever it was that was on his mind. He wasn't pleased with what she had said to him, Will could tell, even without looking at him.

The strange half-light was gone now, full dark broken up by the green of the Northern Lights. Will paused for a moment, head tipped back, gazing up at the sky. He took a deep breath in, the freezing air burning through his body. Hannibal indulged him, waiting patiently at his side until Will slumped into the guiding hand at his elbow and followed him back to their quarters.

The room was as ridiculous as it had first seemed, but now the bed looked like a haven. The idea of cool sheets on his body, of lying quietly in the dark, seemed like the very definition of heaven. Will shrugged off his jacket, toed off his shoes and rubbed his hands over his face.

"Jesus," he said. "I feel like my head's about to fall off my neck." He fumbled at his cufflinks, gave up, and flopped down sideways on the bed, legs hanging off the side. "And at least half the vampires here are viable suspects."

Hannibal settled himself on the other side of the bed, back against the headboard. "Come here," Hannibal said imperiously.

Will thought about protesting, reminding Hannibal that they were colleagues on a case. It sounded disingenuous even in his own thoughts. Too tired to argue, Will hauled himself over so his legs were on the bed and his head was in Hannibal's lap. It took some of the weight off his tired neck and Hannibal was close enough to room temperature that it was just as good as having his head on the cool pillows.

"Close your eyes," Hannibal said. His hands, hands that could rip nails out of wood without effort, were gentle on Will's temples, rubbing in small circles. "Tell me where you go when things overwhelm you."

Will took himself to the quiet place in his mind. "I used to go to the river by my house. It was cold through my waders. I could feel the gentle tug of the current pulling at my legs. Forever on the cusp of autumn, the leaves were turning and the air was clear. I could cast my line, the slow, soft whistle of it through the air, the shining arc of the lure. I'm not needed for anything. I have no murders to solve. No one to crawl inside my head and force me out. Nothing but time to wait for the fish to bite. But now, since the change, everything is different.

"The water is warm and thick; I stand hip deep in blood, the stench of it so heavy I can taste it. The trees are bare, naked limbs scratching and clawing at the sky, and nothing lives. I am alone in a dead world." He trailed off, overcome. There was no safe place left for him. Not in the world of humans he no longer belonged to, not in the strange, hostile community of vampires. Not even in his own mind.

Hannibal's strong fingers continued to massage Will's temples and scalp, drawing out his headache and tension. He dug his fingers into the soft places at the back of Will's skull, and Will felt like the weight of his own head was gone, like he was suspended, separated from his body. He was half-hard from the lack of pain and didn't have it in him to be embarrassed about it.

"When we were human," Hannibal said in a quiet, low murmur, "water was life. Without it we would perish. For your river to be turned to blood does not seem sinister to me. It simply reflects the changes you have gone through."

"Fishing's shittier though," Will mumbled.

"What do you fish for, Will Graham?"

Will couldn't shrug while lying down, so he just hummed vaguely. "Fish," he said. "But now...there's nothing."

"How long have you been depressed?" Hannibal asked, oddly serious.

"I'm not depressed," Will said, then; "It hasn't been an easy adjustment. Can I ask you...what you said about Khirad. Why did he turn you?"

Hannibal smoothed his fingers through Will's hair. "You understand that I agreed to bring you here, not because I care about the crimes, but because I find you interesting," he said, not answering the question at all.

"Don't know how Jack would feel about that."

"Something else I don't care about," Hannibal said, dismissively. "True death could find us at any time. I like to take my opportunities as they come. And I should like to keep you after we are done here." He slid a finger behind the knot of Will's tie and began working it loose, the other hand resting over Will's chest, where his heart no longer beat.

"If I say no?" Will asked.

"I will be disappointed, of course, but I will still help you with your investigation."

Will opened his eyes as Hannibal slid the tie from around his neck and tossed it in the direction of the closet. "The investigation you don't care about," he said. It wasn't the firelight he had seen before in Hannibal's eyes. They were still red-tinted.

If he wanted to, he could reach out and read Hannibal like a book. Instead, Will reached up and tucked his fingers into the neck of Hannibal's waistcoat.

Hannibal leaned down and kissed him on the mouth. His breath was warm and he tasted of blood. It had been a decade since Will had been kissed, and when Hannibal bit gently at his lip, not enough to break the skin, Will pressed up into it.

"You'll let me keep you?" Hannibal asked, barely a question. From anyone else it would have felt like an attempt to glamour him, but there was nothing behind it but the strength of Hannibal's personality. He kept his power to himself, but Will felt compelled nevertheless.

"I feel like I should be signing my name in blood on a scroll," Will said. There were rules to these relationships and he had only scratched the surface. "You're asking me to say yes without knowing what I'm agreeing to," Will said.

Hannibal kissed him again, one hand over Will's throat, the other still on his chest, holding him down without putting any real force behind it. When he sat back, Will felt breathless, hungry for something he didn't need.

"Shit," Will said. "Hannibal, it was just supposed to be a cover story."

Hannibal flicked open the buttons on Will's shirt. "I would have it be true," he said.

Will kissed him lazily, enjoying the slow heat of arousal. He nicked his tongue on one of Hannibal's sharp teeth and Hannibal sucked in a breath, hand fisting in the fabric of Will's shirt.

"Just for tonight then," Hannibal said. His voice had dropped to a growl, thick with arousal. "Will you let me have you just for now?"

Will liked the way Hannibal, carefully put-together, controlled, dangerous Hannibal Lecter wanted him. Hannibal's desire wasn't a neatly packaged thing that fit into his tailored life. Hannibal wanted him, messy, raw, and uncontained. Will felt the tiny nick in his tongue closing up and wanted to taste blood again.

"I hope you don't like that suit very much," Will said.

Hannibal looked startled, but recovered fast. "What-" he began.

Will sat up and pulled Hannibal's vest and shirt open, thread snapping and buttons pattering to the cover of the bed, rolling on the floor, disappearing into the dark of the room. "These fucking suits," Will muttered, "everyone else is too stupid to see what a disguise they are."

Hannibal shoved him down onto his back, straddling his hips. "I do like these suits," he protested.

"They're still a disguise," Will said, dragging the clothing down Hannibal's arms until the seams of the cuffs gave and he could pull it all the way off. There was a scar, white with age, ringed around Hannibal's neck. A silver collar had rubbed the skin raw, burned where it sat. Will ran his hands up over Hannibal's chest, fingertips curling into the hair, and closed himself off against the history that wanted to unfold in his mind.

"God, you look alive," Will said, focusing instead on the curve of Hannibal's mouth, and the lines around his eyes. "You look like you're barely a hundred."

Hannibal's teeth were sharp and they showed when he smiled at Will. "Flattery," he said. "You seem certain I'm so much older."

Will pulled at Hannibal's flies. He could get them open but with the way Hannibal was sitting he couldn't do much more than that. Instead, Will squirmed underneath him, stripping off his own shirt. "You never talk about it. You never hint. You want people to underestimate you."

"But not you?"

"You're not good enough to fool me," Will said. He couldn't remember the last time he'd done this - using his abilities against someone who wasn't afraid of them. Maybe never. "You painted Khirad's portrait, but he wasn't alive then; he was already dead. It throws people off. Diverts them from the truth."

Hannibal moved down the bed, removing Will's trousers and underwear with one easy pull. He nudged Will's inner thighs with his knuckles and Will obediently parted his legs. Hannibal looked at Will's naked body hard enough that Will almost wanted to cover himself.

"I should like to suck you, I think," Hannibal said. His voice was mostly steady, but his control was fraying, pupils dilated, his chest rising and falling irregularly, like he wanted to breathe and then remembered that he didn't need to. His body was waking up; Will had done that to him.

Will swallowed convulsively as Hannibal crouched forward, those sharp, sharp teeth very close to Will's cock. "Yes," he said. "Please."

"So trusting," Hannibal said. "You don't even ask what I mean." He licked a damp stripe up Will's inner thigh over the femoral artery.

Will clutched at the sheets. "Oh my god. I don't know," he said. "Okay," he said.

"To what?"

"To everything," Will said. He let go of the sheet with one hand and put his fingers through Hannibal's hair.

Hannibal didn't bite him, and Will wasn't sure if he was disappointed or not but then he had Will's cock in his mouth, and Will was too busy trying to hold still. Hannibal didn't need to breathe and that, Will thought, was amazing. He didn't need to either, but he was panting, gasping, and shaking under Hannibal's steady hands, but Hannibal swallowed around his cock steadily. The only sign of discomfort was the saliva dripping over his chin, running down Will's cock, and the little automatic hitches Hannibal's shoulders made when he had to push past his gag reflex.

Will wanted to hear him, he was so quiet, but you needed breath to make sound. He threaded both hands into Hannibal's hair. "Is this okay?" he asked. Hannibal blinked up at him and hummed his assent.

Will thrust into his mouth, heels dug into the mattress, hard enough to make Hannibal choke. The attempt to breathe was a long disused response but it made his throat convulse around Will's cock and Will groaned and did it again. "Jesus," he said. "You're good at that."

Hannibal dug his hands into Will's hips and let Will fuck his mouth with enough force to make his body fight instinctively for breath.

He let his teeth graze ever so lightly against Will's cock, and Will was coming. He tried not to pull Hannibal's hair too badly and let go as soon as he regained enough sense to realize he was still holding on.

Hannibal let his cock slip gently from his mouth and crawled back up the bed, taking Will's face in his hands and kissing him. His mouth was wet and Will could taste himself.

"You let me make such a mess out of you," Will murmured, lax with orgasm. "C'mere, I want you to come on me. I know you like how the others can smell you on me."

He wrapped his arms around Hannibal, pushing against his back, coaxing him into fucking against Will, cock riding the in the warm space between their bodies. Hannibal tucked his face into the bend of his neck and shoulder, against the scar tissue, and Will could feel the scrape of his teeth.

He wondered vaguely how long it had been for Hannibal. Will nipped at the tendon standing out on Hannibal's neck and Hannibal pushed down hard against him and came with a moan.

He collapsed next to Will, radiating satisfaction. Hannibal ran his fingers through the mess on Will's chest and stomach, rubbing it in.

"That gift of yours will make you dangerous when you learn how to wield it," Hannibal said, sounding pleased.

"It didn't take a profiler to know you get off on that," Will retorted.

Hannibal glanced at the sheen of his cum on Will's skin and settled down with his head on the pillow. "No," he said. "I suppose not."

It was strange to share a bed again. Will hadn't actually, literally, slept with another person in so long. Far longer than he'd been a vampire. Would he hog the covers, would he kick Hannibal in his sleep? Would his nightmares wake them both up?

"You have to have realized I'm kind of a disaster. Mentally. I just don't understand why you'd want to..." Will gestured broadly, trying to encompass everything in the one gesture. "Considering your noble and ancient lineage." He tried not to let the sarcasm creep into his voice and only mostly failed.

"Your changing was traumatic and no one has shown you how to focus your amplified senses. Of course you are unstable."

At least he wasn't arguing on that front. Will stared up at the ornate ceiling rather than make eye contact. "What about your lineage? You said it was important, but you didn't tell me it was *so* crucial to almost every interaction vampires have."

For a while, Hannibal was silent. "When I was human, still a child, I was done a great wrong. More than anything I desired revenge but by the time I was forty-one I had yet to complete it and it occurred to me that I was running out of time. Immortality would remove that obstacle. I put aside my revenge and began chasing the rumours of a man who never aged, and never died. It took me seven years to track him and discover the truth of what Khirad was. Mercifully, I was smart enough to realize that confronting him would be the death of me; I was not the sort to catch his attention."

Hannibal glanced over at open door towards the portrait of his sire. "As you said, Khirad was very beautiful. He had a great appreciation for beauty also. He often lamented that although I turned out to be a strong and worthy childer, I was not more pleasing to the eye."

Will thought Khirad had to be very particular, very stupid, or more interested in degrading Hannibal than the truth.

"So what'd you do?" Will asked.

"I set a trap," Hannibal said, "drew his blood, and while he raged at me from the prison I had made for him, I bled myself out and transfused in his blood. Khirad didn't turn me. I used him to turn myself."

"You." Will couldn't find the words. He sat up, horrified. "You did this to yourself?"

Hannibal stayed where he was, unmoving, unblinking. "Being a vampire has, if you will believe it, tempered me a great deal. I was never..." Hannibal paused, trying to find the right way to explain. "I didn't have much humanity to lose," he said at last. "So you see, my respect for that tradition is understandably limited. I would have done the same thing no matter who the vampire was. A fledgling would have satisfied my needs but I happened to make myself part of something ancient. Perhaps it made me stronger than I might otherwise have been, but who is to say."

Will let Hannibal pull him back down into the sheets and curled up against his side, Hannibal's arm heavy around his shoulders.

"Of course you're interested in me," Will said with a sigh. "You're out of your mind."

The corner of Hannibal's mouth curled up ever so slightly and he tucked his other hand under his head. Unfortunately, smugness sat well on him. It made him unfairly attractive. "I defer to your expertise, of course, Professor."

If Hannibal liked the slightly-crazed, probably unstable thing, who was Will to judge. He was apparently into overly analytical vampires of unknown age, who had *turned themselves*, what the fuck. Will had been with men back before he was a vampire, mostly because it was easier to get casual fucks from other men. He'd never been a relationship with one. And after less than twenty-four hours, he was considering something that sounded a lot more binding than a few dates and some sex.

"Sorry about your suit," Will muttered.

"You may destroy them all," Hannibal said carelessly. "I would let you do far worse for the opportunity to see you, and be seen by you."

Chapter End Notes

What Komeda says (I hope): Does he pin you down with those remarkable eyes when he fucks you? What things he must see with that gift of his.

You Are What You Eat

Chapter Notes

> This chapter contains descriptions of a really abusive relationship between two vampires. It contains non-consensual mind reading, non-consensual glamouring, and generally everyone is in each others' head without permission. Everything else is covered by either "vampires" or "Hannibal". Please read responsibly.

Will woke up feeling better than he had in a long time. His head didn't hurt, he actually felt relaxed and well-rested. And for the first time in ten years there was someone in the bed-

Will turned his head.

There was no one in the bed with him.

Will sighed. He didn't bother checking if the sheets were still warm. They wouldn't be; Hannibal's body was very close to room temperature. Will sat up and yawned, wondering if Hannibal had more of his faux coffee. He couldn't hear the shower running but he certainly could smell something delicious.

There was a robe draped over the foot of the bed, waiting for him. For a garment with only one function - to preserve his modesty - it did very little on that account. Despite the masculine cut, it was made of some embarrassingly diaphanous fabric. Suspicious, Will checked in the wardrobe and sure enough there was a soft flannel dressing gown tucked away at the very back. Clearly Hannibal had been hoping for more than friendship if he'd packed a semi-opaque silk robe, but he'd also been unsure enough to bring something wholly inoffensive and modest if Will hadn't been amenable.

He hesitated for a few moments, debating the merits of swapping them out, but eventually Will decided he didn't actually care that much one way or the other. He didn't have to look at himself and it wasn't as though he was going to get cold.

Will came into the kitchen, still tying the sash around his waist, to find Hannibal standing over the stove in rather boring pyjama pants and a sweater. What a dick.

Will tucked the robe around himself more securely. "G'morning," he said. "Night." Will sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "Hey."

Hannibal glanced over and then turned to properly take in Will's appearance. He tucked his fingers into the belt of the robe and Will shuffled forwards to avoid it being pulled loose. "You look..." Hannibal dragged his knuckles up Will's stomach and chest, over his throat, under his chin. "Would you be offended if I said you were beautiful?"

"I'd be concerned for your eyesight," Will said but he leaned in and kissed Hannibal anyway. "You've been planning this since we met."

"And what is this?" Hannibal asked.

"A seduction. Your breakfast is starting to get crispy."

Hannibal startled a little, before turning back to the stove. "I was hopeful," he said, frowning down at the pan before plating the blackened food. "I'll eat this one."

"Are you making crepes?"

Hannibal poured more bloody batter into the pan, paying careful attention to it this time. "I am."

"But we can't eat," Will said, knowing it was a stupid sentiment, as Hannibal was clearly preparing something.

"Yes, and also no. A common misconception," Hannibal said. "It took many years but I have perfected the balance of blood and other foodstuffs so I am sufficiently nourished and also don't go mad from eating the same thing for all eternity."

He plated the food and put it in front of Will. "Enjoy," he said.

Will picked up a knife and fork and hesitantly cut himself a bite. He had spent a miserable hour puking up the last solid food he had tried to eat.

The blood crepes were delicious.

"This is amazing," Will said, trying not to make sex noises while he ate. "You're amazing."

"Well," Hannibal said modestly. "I'm glad you like it. It's not something I am often able to share with others. Eating is a requirement for humans and we are supposed to be more than that."

"They look down on it," Will said, surprised. He was pretty sure when Hannibal said, 'not often' what he meant was 'virtually never.'

"It comes in and out of fashion. Mostly out." Hannibal made his own breakfast - more coffee than crepes, which amused Will - a vampire that had trouble getting started in the early hours of his day. "Anything other than blood directly from the source is considered inferior."

Will shrugged. "Then they're letting tradition get in the way of their own good time," he said. "Hell with them."

Hannibal's smile was small, but Will could tell how pleased he was.

It wasn't until Hannibal had poured himself a second cup of coffee that he truly woke up. "So, tell me, Will," he said, "what are you looking for, now that you have seen the majority of the attendees?"

Will wiped at his mouth with the linen napkin he had been provided with, a little embarrassed by his own table manners. "It's hard to say. So many people are angry it's difficult to separate out murderous intent from just being a vampire. Most, if not all, of the people here have killed someone so it makes finding one murderer a little like finding a needle in a stack of slightly different needles. And it's possible the killer is smart enough to conceal his intent."

Hannibal drummed his fingers on the table. "If I may - There will be two factors at play. One, these vampires are old and cunning. They will have experience at obscuring their trail. But the second factor is arrogance. The older we get the less we believe we can be killed. Foolish, but there you have it."

"I've been profiling this killer as a man," Will said suddenly. "But women...female vampires...I don't know how to profile them. I'm wrong to assume the killer is male."

Hannibal smiled a little, like Will had just passed some sort of test. On a personal level, it made Will feel like he'd accomplished something; on a professional level it did make him wonder how much Hannibal was withholding.

"You are quite correct to suspect both genders," Hannibal said. "Since vampires do not reproduce the same as humans, and strength and power are determined by age and lineage. Gender roles are mostly irrelevant, just as sexuality is irrelevant. The way gender and sexuality are viewed have changed as human civilizations rise and fall. Vampires tend to ignore that sort of thing. Assume that any crime could be committed by anyone strong enough to manage it."

Will, coffee halfway to his mouth, froze. "Oh my god," he said. "Van Helsing could be a woman."

"It's entirely possible," Hannibal said placidly. "Consider the motive behind the murders without prescribing traditional twentieth century gender attributes to them.

Will frowned down at his empty plate for a while until he shook his head. "No. No, not Helsing. I've looked at so many crime scenes, I'd know. But this...this feels different. It's a sort of infanticide. I think we might be looking for a woman. She sees these fledglings as sickly and weak. This is her version of exposure."

"Why isn't Van Helsing a woman?" Hannibal asked.

Will sipped at his coffee, trying to find a way to put it into words. "I've spent a lot of time with Van Helsing, looking at his scenes, trying to understand him. He's hard to fully realize, but I've got enough to see his shadow, to feel him like someone behind me in a darkened room. He's not a woman."

Hannibal freshened Will's cup. "You have a rare gift, Will," he said, fingertips brushing over Will's back. "Is there something specific you want to look at today? I have to spend time attending Lady Komeda since I reside in her territory, but it's not urgent."

The programme was sitting on the breakfast bar, so Will pulled it over and flipped it open. He'd been to his share of conventions over the years. His time working CSI had been liberally punctuated by conventions and conferences and, hilariously, it didn't seem all that different.

"You're amused by something," Hannibal said.

"The only thing this place is missing is dorky-looking name tags and convention passes."

Hannibal touched his tongue to one sharp eye-tooth. "I think passes are probably unnecessary."

"Maybe a badly DJ'd dance night then," Will said.

"Who says there isn't one," Hannibal said. Will started to laugh and then realized he wasn't joking.

The suit Hannibal chose for him was a dark charcoal, the same colour as the checking on Hannibal's own suit, and it felt just as tight in the shoulders as the others had. Will refrained from asking if the whole Baltimore area had a theme colour.

The receiving area for the Komeda household was much larger than Hannibal's to accommodate all the vampires milling around, exchanging pleasantries and thinly veiled insults. The art was extensive, dating back long enough that there were only clay statues and painted urns.

They drew curious glances as they entered, a few conversations switching from English to some dialect of French that Will hadn't heard before, or Latin. So much for eavesdropping to see if he could pick up clues about the Invisible Man.

"How many languages do you speak?" Will muttered under his breath.

"Are you including modern and non-modern versions as one?" Hannibal asked. "More than ten, perhaps closer to twenty at this point, though my Aramaic is rusty."

"Oh, well," Will said sarcastically. "How embarrassing."

"And he lets you tease him," Lady Komeda said, appearing through the crowd. "You will have to come sit with me later."

Hannibal kissed the air next to her cheek and then it was Will's turn to greet her. He bowed stiffly from the waist and since no one said anything, he assumed he'd got it right.

"Hannibal, you have to come and talk to Edmund about that Senator. He's in up to his neck in it and the Air Force are getting involved for some ungodly reason."

Will trailed after them, only listening with half an ear. Apparently Baltimore and Washington were close enough that whatever the name of Komeda's bloodline, they had major pull in the government. Jack would love that. Their conversation switched to what Will now assumed was Medieval French, as Hannibal and Lady Komeda spoke to Edmund.

He let his gaze slide over the room, not lingering on anyone in particular. Although he couldn't understand most of them, you didn't need to in order to read tone and he caught the word Van Helsing a few times. They were more worried than they were letting on. It was a regional

problem, whereas the Invisible Man was moving around America, going from one territory to another.

More than one group were talking about him. He caught Hannibal's name a few times and the tone was not encouraging. Claude from the first meeting was there, as was the male vampire who had seemed so close with Lady Amarantha. Neither of them were shy about the disapproving looks they cast in Will's direction. Will made a note to get the name of Amarantha's friend.

A few of the others were just curious and Will crossed them off his list. Curiosity would eventually lead to someone asking him to perform, like what he did was some sort of party trick, but that was annoying, not dangerous. Although, one vampire - male, handsome in a strange sort of way, very green eyes - was hard to get a read on. His motives slid away from Will like water down glass.

A young man - human - caught Will's attention, distracting him, but the man simply offered his wrist, like a waiter with a tray of drinks. Will shook his head, unable to quite find the words as to how much he didn't want that.

Hannibal excused himself from his conversation. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"It's nothing," Will said. "I just..." He couldn't remember what had seemed important.

"If his gift is half as powerful as people are saying," Komeda interrupted, "then you're being very cruel making him stand around all these people. Go, we'll talk later. I'll make your excuses."

Hannibal hesitated, clearly torn between social obligation and managing Will's discomfort, before he said his goodbyes and ushered Will back out of the cabin.

The cold air felt fantastic after such a close space, even though vampires didn't generate much heat.

"Did you see something interesting?" Hannibal asked.

"Why aren't there more young vampires in the entourages and retinues?" Will said, picking up something that had been bothering him for a while. "I mean, I know this meeting is for older, more established vampires, but something like eighty percent of known vampires are under two hundred. Most of those are younger still."

"The elders of our kind frown deeply upon such frivolous creation," Hannibal said. "The older a vampire is when he or she creates progeny often means the power they have developed over the years will ensure a strong and powerful childer. Of course as you know, accidents happen, and the young don't always listen. Young vampires greatly outnumber us - in number if not in power. They create progeny exponentially, like humans, spreading as a virus does. But they have short half-lives. They do not survive as your sires did not survive."

"So what you're saying, is that pretty much any of the elders of any Clan could be responsible for murdering unapproved childers," Will said.

Hannibal raised an eyebrow. "They could be," he said.

Will scrubbed a hand over his face. "Oh good."

"They would not do it so publicly," Hannibal said. "This is not a calculated culling. This is a serial killer."

"Who might have been sanctioned by a Clan. Or been given tacit approval."

"I would know if that were the case," Hannibal said, as though there was nothing worrying about that at all. "The balance we maintain with humans is fragile. If they don't trust us, they might begin to hunt us. And we are so vastly outnumbered. We would be forced back underground. No Clan would approve something that could start such a war. They might agree with the sentiment, but no one would say so."

"Okay," Will said, relieved. "That's something. Explains why everyone thinks I'm trash at least."

Hannibal's mouth flattened into a disapproving line. "They are frightened and jealous of what you can do," he said. "Their rudeness-"

"Is all tucked away where only I can see it," Will said. "You can't get mad at someone for the shit they think in the privacy of their own heads."

Hannibal's expression said he thought otherwise, but he let the matter drop. "Pedigree is irrelevant," he said at last. "Bloodline and age do not always indicate power."

Something in his voice made Will look meet his gaze. Hannibal was looking at him steadily, that same open interest that he'd shown the night before. Will squirmed a little under the attention. "Don't," he said.

"For the most part," Hannibal said, "power does come through the bloodline. The stronger the sire, the stronger the childer. Creation forges bonds, some of them psychic. It is not just loyalty by virtue of tradition that creates Clans, but an actual link between two vampires. The death of a sire can prove fatal to weak progeny. The psychic shock is too much for them."

He was standing very close to Will but the odd vampire passing them by paid them little notice.

"Of course, not everyone is so easily predicted," Hannibal said. "Sometimes circumstances come together at random." His voice was a low, persuasive rumble and Will couldn't look away.

"Are you trying to glamour me," he said, barely able to choke out more than a whisper.

"Would you like me to?" Hannibal asked. "Some people enjoy that."

"Some people drink tea with their pinkies sticking out," Will muttered.

Hannibal took Will's face in his hands. "*Kiss me*," he said. The power behind it was barely a push. It was a psychic nudge more than anything else, hardly a compulsion.

This wasn't what a glamour was supposed to feel like, Will thought, as Hannibal's lips brushed his own. Under certain circumstances, a glamour could make you believe the thoughts were your own. It could be a force to turn your body against you; somewhere between hypnosis and command. But this was something else. His skin was crawling and he jerked away from Hannibal, feeling sick to his stomach.

It didn't make him want to do anything, it just opened him up, the glamour digging into him like a spike, forcing a connection between them. What little fortifications he had built up were breached. He was stuffed full of Hannibal's thoughts, drowned in information. It was like he could see Hannibal's life laid out in still frames and fragments of memory - the crushing, relentless tide of time, cruelty, curiosity, a bottomless chasm of hunger that not even the hundreds of years of blood could fill - and it didn't feel like there was any space left for himself.

"He used to do it to you," Will said, trying to purge himself, to bleed out some of the things inside him. It was the thought that lingered in Hannibal's mind as the connection was forged. "Khirad. He used the psychic link between you, once you'd turned yourself. Put thoughts in your head, took them out again, emptied out everything you were. He did it to you until there was nothing left, until you weren't sure which way was up, until you learned to block him. I don't think he went into the sun," Will said. He pressed his face to Hannibal's shoulder, trying to find his balance. "I don't think he killed himself. I don't...I need to sit down."

Hannibal took him by the arm, fingers digging in too tightly, and hauled him across the frozen ground back to their cabin. Will could feel him trying to close himself off, but he'd opened the link between them and now Will was hemorrhaging secrets.

Once he'd got them safely behind closed doors, Hannibal eased Will onto one of the fainting couches and took Will's shoes off for him, loosening his tie and unbuttoning his collar like he would for a human patient. His thoughts were focussed on each moment as it came, each button, each movement of his hands. His face was carefully blank. It helped Will time to get himself back under control, as he packed the power back down, one synapse at a time.

Eventually Will was alone in his head again. Hannibal must have been able to feel the difference because even though he didn't say anything and there was no change to his expression, Will knew he was suddenly on very dangerous ground.

Hannibal got up and stood by the window, looking out at the snow. He made no move to approach Will, letting him have space. A nice enough illusion of safety, Will thought, since Hannibal was capable of reaching him before he so much as took two steps towards the door.

"I didn't mean to see," Will said. "I wasn't trying to..." Intent didn't matter, Will realized. Not with something so important. Hannibal needed to know what Will had taken from him. "You tell everyone he killed himself, but you don't regret his passing as though he took himself from you. You were resigned to his death before he even died." Will swallowed uselessly. "I think you killed him. What I can't figure out is how, if the connection between sire and progeny is as strong as you say it is. He was so far into your head."

"Even a beaten dog may one day bite its master." Hannibal touched his throat where the scarring was.

"Why wouldn't he just send you away?" Will asked, but he knew the answer before Hannibal spoke: cruelty.

"Tradition. Power," Hannibal said. He seemed to notice what he was doing and put his hand in his pocket. "I made myself and he could never let anyone know. If word got out that a human had trapped him, and stolen from him what we consider to be a great gift to be given..."

Will's head was starting to clear, his own thoughts filling out the space Hannibal had made, closing himself off again. He sat up properly, feet on the floor and rested his elbows on his knees. "He would have been challenged. For what? Territory, control over minor bloodlines?"

"Exactly that. Since he couldn't send me away, he taught me our traditions, as was his duty, so I wouldn't embarrass his line."

"He tried to break you."

"Within the strictures of our customs," Hannibal agreed. "He would never have released me. Spite, I suppose. I would have died at his hand, in the end. And so I took his life, before he could deprive me of my own. I wept for the loss of him."

It didn't quite answer Will's question as to how he had survived it. Maybe it had been a kamikaze mission. If he lived, he lived. If killing Khirad meant dying, so be it. He'd said becoming a vampire had tempered him; Will was beginning to wonder what he had been like before.

"If the others knew," Will said. He was shaking, he realized, hands scrubbing at his face like he could reach into his skull and wipe away that creeping feeling of someone being inside his head.

Hannibal's gaze was placid in the same way alligator infested waters could look calm. "They will not," he said.

"I'm not going to *tell on you*," Will said, exasperated. "I don't give a shit. What I want to know is how the customs work. You're established and the others respect you. I get that a newly made vampire would be put to the true death, but if someone of your standing confessed to killing their sire however many hundreds of years ago..."

"Even I would not escape unscathed," Hannibal said at last. "They would not try to put me to the true death, not now. But a lengthy imprisonment would not be out of the question."

"Vampire jail?" Will said.

"Not quite," Hannibal said. "But I wouldn't like to experience it. As for the circumstances of my turning, I don't know. There is no precedent and I don't intent to set it." Hannibal stayed by the window even though there wasn't much to look at outside. Will got up and came to stand near him, close enough to touch, but not actually reaching out. Then Hannibal said, "What happens if you glamour someone? Does it work the same way?"

"No idea, I've never tried it. I don't want to try it," he said.

Hannibal put his hand to Will's forehead like he was checking for fever. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yeah," Will said. "Don't glamour me and I won't be able to get into your head like that. I also won't puke on your shoes, which was looking like a possibility back then. Look, I need to take a break from this before my head splits open."

Hannibal stroked a hand through his hair, drawing him close. "I have just the thing," Hannibal said.

As it turned out, Hannibal did not have just the thing. Hannibal, Will thought, was a fucking idiot.

They were in another communal area, no light but candles behind smoked glass, sofas, and beds, and cushions spread out like a brothel from some Orientalist fantasy. He'd been right. After a few hundred years people started getting weird.

Around the room humans were talking, dancing, flirting with vampires. People were fucking as well, he could hear them, smell them. He could smell fresh blood in the air and he wanted it so badly his teeth ached.

Hannibal found them a corner that no one was actively fucking in and sank down onto one of the sofas. "Come here," Hannibal said, holding out a hand. There were humans sprawled on the cushions near his feet and one half curled up against him as Will watched.

Will felt something a lot like jealousy flaring up. "No thanks," he said, and didn't bother to hide the displeasure in his voice.

"Will," Hannibal said, more firmly, and Will went, sitting next to him.

He perched right on the edge of the cushion. "You have two minutes," Will said, pain making him short-tempered. "And then I'm leaving."

He could see Hannibal scenting the people around him before he caught the hand of a young woman and drew her towards them. Hannibal settled her between them and, like a stage magician drawing back his cape, revealing some mystery, he swept her hair back from her throat.

"I promise this will help," Hannibal said. "I am a doctor."

"You're insane," Will said. "I'm not drinking from..." he stopped abruptly. His sense of smell wasn't remotely as acute as Hannibal's but something was off. "Is she *high*?" Will demanded. He caught hold of the woman's chin so he could look at her pupils. She was fucked up on something. "Are you trying to get me high?" he said.

Hannibal sighed, as though Will was being unreasonable. "It's a therapeutic technique used-"

"My ass it is," Will said. "Your two minutes are up, Lecter." He didn't wait to see if Hannibal would follow him and headed back to the room.

He was most of the way there, already outside, when the green-eyed vampire from Komeda's meet-and-greet approached him, partially blocking his way. Something about him. Will couldn't put his finger on it. He was about five-nine and built like a runner. Will could see the strength in his body, even under the suit. He wasn't the oldest vampire Will had bumped into, Will was getting a better handle on that, but he was at least eight hundred.

They were alone, between cabins, and the wind had picked up so it was near whiteout conditions.

"You're Will Graham," the vampire said. He had a southern accent that made Will's half-forgotten drawl want to come crawling back out. He had very green eyes and he was handsome, beautiful even.

"I am," Will said, pleased to have been noticed.

"Count Lecter's childer," voice low and melodic.

"Companion," he said. "We're not blood."

The vampire smiled at him, teeth flashing white. "That's right. The Seer. How old are you, darlin'?" He seemed so friendly, so handsome, so-

Will shook his head. Something wasn't right. Something creeping like an oil slick in his mind. He looked away, staring into the blankness of the snow. The feeling of attraction faded. Will kept his eyes fixed on a point just past the vampire.

"I think I should go," Will said, taking a step back.

The vampire took two steps closer and even though there wasn't anything at his back, Will felt terribly hemmed in. He wished he had his gun.

"You've been left out here all alone. That just don't seem right."

"Touch him, Luc, and I'll disarticulate your hands," Hannibal said, appearing out of the gloom. "One small joint at a time."

The vampire, Luc, didn't seem overly impressed. "Lecter," he said. "Sounded to me like Graham wasn't interested in what you were offering. If he wants to look elsewhere..."

Will took four very quick steps back until he was within arm's length of Hannibal, but Hannibal kept walking, right past him into Luc's space. "Should I tell Sabine you were trying to poach through use of coercion and glamour?" Hannibal said.

Luc might have been old, but he clearly wasn't very bright, because he looked past Hannibal and said to Will, "Any time you want to come see me, darlin', you let me know and I'll-"

He was cut off when Hannibal grabbed him by the throat, fast as a snake. "*Leave*," Hannibal said, in a terrible voice that rang like a bell in Will's head.

A vacant expression slackened Luc's face, not so handsome now without the compulsion behind it. He left.

Will didn't protest when Hannibal half-hauled, half-herded him into the cabin and said angrily, "I told you not to wander alone." His grip was too tight on Will's arm but Will didn't try to get away. Hannibal wasn't unsettled, per se, but he was pissed.

"I wasn't wandering!" Will said. "Relax, Hannibal, he wasn't the Invisible Man."

"Of course he wasn't," Hannibal said dismissively, releasing Will's arm. "He was trying to, for lack of a better word, steal you." Then Hannibal's expression smoothed out. "He is unimportant. Now, I promised I would help you with your headache, and my previous solution was-"

"Insane?" Will interrupted.

Hannibal's mouth twitched in irritation. "Not acceptable to you-"

"I'm not drinking from humans," Will said. "You're trying to help, I get it, but no."

Hannibal shrugged out of his suit jacket and let it fall to the floor. "So I have another solution." His vest was summarily unbuttoned and put aside. Will watched the methodical removal of Hannibal's clothing until he realized what was going on.

"Sex?" he said. "That's your miracle headache cure?"

"Not at all," Hannibal said, smiling so Will could see his fangs. "I just dislike getting blood on my clothing." He dropped his shirt on top of the jacket and vest. "Do you trust me?"

"Not even a little," Will said, following Hannibal to the bedroom, stripping as he went. "Whose blood?"

Hannibal pushed him back onto the bed, climbing up after him. "Yours," Hannibal said. He waited all of one breath, giving Will a second to protest, before he tilted Will's head to one side and bit down.

It hurt, just for a second, and then it didn't. It was nothing like when he'd been made. It was like getting fucked, having someone else in you, Hannibal's mouth warm over his throat. Will groaned and clutched at his shoulders, but Hannibal pulled away, licking at the blood seeping from Will's neck, even as the puncture wounds began to close.

"Do it again," Will said. "Or fuck me, either one." He thought for a second Hannibal would deny him, but he just slid further down the bed, pausing to suck Will's hardening cock for just long enough that Will thought they were going to fuck, before he pushed Will's thighs apart and bit him again. His shoulders kept Will's knees apart, his hands holding Will's hips in place as he drank. His hair brushed maddeningly over Will's cock and Will ran his fingers through it, getting it out of the way so he could see Hannibal's face.

He was dizzy, panting up at the ceiling, and he heard himself saying Hannibal's name, heard himself beg for it. And Hannibal obliged, opening him up - wrists, and throat, and thighs. The brachial artery, the bend of his elbows, until Will's cock softened from lack of blood, until he couldn't do more than twitch feebly, panting for air he didn't need. He wasn't able to hold on to Hannibal any more, drained to incoherency. The wounds on his femoral artery, on his wrists and chest, were still bleeding sluggishly; he'd stopped healing. If he hadn't been dead already, he would be now.

Hannibal looked human, flush and pink-cheeked from sex and stolen life. He sucked blood off his fingers and then leaned over to lick at the drying streaks all over Will's body. The pressure of his mouth made Will's head loll to the side, exposing the ruin of his throat.

"You perfect creature," Hannibal whispered into the wound. "In all my years I have never seen anything quite like you." His fingers, slick with lube, pushed into Will as he bit down again, more for the feeling, since he was hardly sucking at all.

Will's fingers twitched against the sheets. He wanted to beg Hannibal to get it over with, but he wasn't sure what 'it' was. He wanted to come, he wanted blood, he wanted Hannibal to do this to him forever. It didn't matter, he couldn't find his voice.

Hannibal sat back, kneeling, and pulled Will's hips up onto his thighs, the width of his body causing Will's legs to fall open. He caught Will's knees in the crook of his elbows as he bent Will in half, cock sliding in. Finally. Will's breath left him in a moan, but he couldn't do anything else. He was thick but Will's body had no resistance left in it.

He had a smear of Will's blood drying on his cheek, his sharp teeth still red, his eyes the same dark stain. Hannibal let one of Will's legs drop, so he could turn Will's face towards him. It changed the angle he was penetrating Will at, and shocked a small, desperate noise out of Will. "Please," he slurred.

Hannibal lifted Will, settling him on his lap, still rag-doll limp. He pressed Will's face to his own throat. Will licked at the scar there, the artery, disorientated.

"Go ahead," Hannibal said and Will bit down.

Blood flooded his mouth and he swallowed helplessly. He could feel some of it running down his chin, dripping down Hannibal's chest and he moaned, body coming back to life. Hannibal made a sound like a snarl and started fucking him again, bouncing Will on his cock.

Will could feel the bite marks on his flesh closing up, his cock filling out. His limbs were still responding sluggishly, but Will got his knees underneath himself, one arm around Hannibal's neck, the other holding on, cupping his head, fingers tight in his hair as he drank.

Hannibal pulled Will's hair in return, adjusting the angle at which Will was biting him and then sank his own teeth into Will's neck again. Blood in, blood out. And oh, how Hannibal desired him. The terrible things he wanted to do, to Will, with Will. He could taste it, filling him up, a thousand years of blood, and then he was coming so hard he thought he blacked out a little bit.

They released each other and Will shoved Hannibal down onto his back, rolling his hips. Hannibal caught hold of him, pushing him down on his cock, grinding up, and came, panting.

Will rolled off him onto the bloody sheets. He felt fantastic. Every inch of him was humming with life, and strength. He could do anything.

Hannibal trailed his fingers through the cum on his stomach before licking them clean. "How's your headache?" Hannibal asked, infernally smug and altogether pleased with himself.

Only the Good Die Young

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Will must have dozed off at some point because he woke up to Hannibal gripping his shoulder. Hannibal's hand was cold and there was snow melting in his hair. Will barely had a moment to wonder what time it was, and how long he had slept, before Hannibal was saying, "You need to get up, there's been another murder."

"Shit," Will said, rubbing at his eyes. He watched Hannibal rummage through the closet, the strong lines of his back under his suit as he pulled out a shirt and trousers for Will. He wanted to taste the skin of Hannibal's shoulders, his spine, his hips, thighs, and cock. Will caught the clothing Hannibal tossed him and sighed. He did not want to get out of bed, but he shoved the blanket away and got up.

"Who has jurisdiction here?" Will asked.

Hannibal was watching him dress with a carefully neutral expression but there were minute changes around his mouth and eyes that showed his indifference to the death, and much greater interest in Will's body and going back to bed. Will looked away. One of them had to be responsible about it.

"That's not how it works," Hannibal said. "The whole reason for meeting here is that it is no one's territory. No one has jurisdiction. If you want to examine the crime scene we shall have to move quickly." Hannibal licked his thumb and wiped a smudge of dried blood off Will's neck, hidden almost behind his ear. There were other patches flaking off under his clothes, but there was no helping that.

Will wondered how pissed off Jack would be if they forgot the murders and spent the rest of the day fucking because Hannibal smelled fantastic. Distracted, Will pressed his face to Hannibal's neck so he could really breathe him in. Hannibal smoothed a hand down Will's back as though to draw him away, but he tilted his head to give Will better access to his throat.

"Do I smell like you now?" Hannibal asked, voice low and intimate. He did. He smelled like both of them together, and Will wanted to strip them both back down and find out if his theory about the height of the bed was right. Hannibal had long legs, but Will was fairly certain that if he positioned himself with his feet on the floor, bent over the mattress, he'd be about the right height for Hannibal to really fuck him hard.

Will groaned and pushed himself away. "This is so inappropriate," he said. "I need to go look at the body."

"If we must," Hannibal said, and led the way out into the snow. Will took a moment to adjust himself and followed, absolutely not thinking about Hannibal's teeth in his throat, his hands covetous over Will's body.

The corpse - which sobered his thoughts quickly - was barely ten meters from their cabin. Already a crowd had gathered, ringed around the crime scene, unwilling to get within a certain distance. They were talking amongst themselves with varying levels of curiosity or distress. The crowd parted easily enough for Hannibal and, by extension, Will, but Will could hear the rumble of commentary behind their backs. He couldn't understand the language the gossip was in, but he understood the tone and he didn't much care for it. He wasn't prying into the personal business of anyone, so he wished they'd extend the same courtesy and not pry into his and Hannibal's affairs. They weren't the only ones who had been fucking, he could smell it on others in the crowd.

"Ignore them," Hannibal said. "This is the most interesting thing to happen to this community in two hundred years."

Will had the uncomfortable feeling Hannibal was talking about their relationship, not the corpse. He went to settle his sunglasses on his nose only to realize he'd forgotten them back in the room. The sky was a deep-blue twilight but it wasn't hurting his eyes or chapping his skin. How the sun reflected off the snow, where it sat in relation to his position on the planet, Will had no idea but it made looking at the body easier. There were flurries in the air, he didn't need glasses getting in the way.

The victim's blood was frozen all around her, cementing her body to the ice. She was badly mutilated, so much so that Will was only assuming she was a woman, because of the size of her feet and hands. Between the long hair on many of the men, and the do what you will attitude towards clothing, it made most identifying markers fairly useless.

Her body was a mess of deep punctures and long gashes, and her face was slashed so badly Will wasn't sure he'd recognize her even if they had met already. It was grotesque, but it would have been survivable save for the stab wounds that had pulped her neck so badly her head had separated from her body. Same as the others.

Will took a deep breath in, trying to centre himself. The blood was familiar to him. He knew that smell. He hadn't registered it before, hadn't even noticed it, but he had met the woman before, he was sure of that now.

"She is of Lady Komeda's line," Hannibal said. "Lene's new childer."

Will had seen her, or if he had he hadn't paid her any attention, since she was almost certainly not the Invisible Man. "That's not right," he said. "That's not the pattern. The Invisible Man targets young vampires that don't have proper clan ties."

"Are you sure it's the same killer?" Hannibal asked. He turned to look at the crowd, faint frown lines appearing. "Can you spare me a moment? I need to -"

Will could see Komeda pushing her way through the spectators. "Go," he said. "I don't need a sounding board for this part."

Will focused on the crime scene, letting everything else wash away, the crowd, the noise. The pendulum swung, blood flowed back into the body, the knife rolled back into the victim's hand. Severed flesh became whole again.

"I see the victim alone," Will said. "It's a chance encounter. I am also alone, hoping the cold air will cool my anger. It will not. There is something on the wind that rekindles my rage. Something I hear or smell. This was supposed to be a place where others share my ideals and I know it is not."

Will turned to look, and saw his own cabin, understood then what had infuriated the Invisible Man. "I smell corruption," he said. "An ancient bloodline is being polluted as I stand here. My ideals are all that matter. These thoughts have taken over, they compel me.

"The victim and I are passingly acquainted so she offers me a courteous greeting. She is well-bred, as it should be, but I am filled with anger as the low-bred, interloper fledgling is filled with blood he does not deserve. This should have been a place where all childers have been carefully chosen, properly made. The childer in front of me adheres to the rules but it only highlights where those rules have been tossed aside, where they are being tossed aside right now.

"She meets my eye and I have her.

"The knife is her own. It was a gift, she uses it to open the soft flesh of humans. It's steel, not silver. She doesn't struggle when I tell her to plunge it into her own chest, her stomach, her face. She is weak. I am doing the bloodline a service, culling the undeserving. Blood spills but it does not interest me. She is unworthy, but she is not the one I want. My anger infects her. She stabs herself feverishly, weakening. There is nothing in her mind but what I tell her. She has just enough strength to destroy her neck, removing her head. This is my design."

Will opened his eyes. The crowd had quieted, everyone watching him. He didn't feel the sticky threads of someone else's thoughts clinging to him this time. Slipping out of the skin of the Invisible Man was so much easier than Will had thought it would be. His head was already clearing.

Hannibal was at his side again, rapt. "That's remarkable," Hannibal said. "Do you see events unfold before you, like a vision, or just the thoughts of the killer?"

"Not right now," Will said. He wasn't going to get any more time with the victim. Gentiana and her staff were rallying around the body and humans were setting up a structure around it, blocking out the onlookers. They'd have to warm the space before they'd be able to detach the corpse from the ice.

The crowd began to disperse in little gossipy cliques and Will could see Lady Komeda waiting for them. Like Hannibal, she didn't look upset, but she was angry. It was a slow, patient anger, and Will could see how she had survived for so many years. She nominally let Hannibal lead them back to their cabin, but it was on her insistence.

Lady Komeda looked around at the clothing still scattered about on the floor, and the decidedly well-used bed. Will didn't meet her eyes, but he hadn't been planning on doing that anyway, embarrassment aside. Hannibal just stood there, one hand in his pocket, the ghost of a smile on his face.

Komeda give Hannibal a narrow look. "Was this really the time?" she said, irritably. "You knew this could set the killer off, and now look what happened. And it's not exactly romantic."

Will wondered if it was possible for a vampire to spontaneously combust from embarrassment.

"Elianna, please," Hannibal said with an utter lack of shame. "These things happen when they happen."

"Lene is beside herself, she's half-ready to murder Mr. Graham herself."

"I'd advise her not to try," Hannibal said.

"Don't be ridiculous," Komeda said. "Of course she's not going to do anything, but if the two of you don't pull some miracle out of this mess, there are going to be repercussions. People are starting to question your judgement, Hannibal. This dalliance might have been passed off as a whim, or an errant fancy, but you've made it perfectly clear that's not the case. Khirad would be -"

"What he would or would not be is inconsequential," Hannibal said tersely. "My life is my own. I am not beholden to your line."

Komeda sighed. "I know you aren't, but I worry anyway." She turned her attention to Will. "So what do you think, Mr Graham; can you catch the Invisible Man?"

"Maybe. But we have a problem," Will said. "This murder, it's because of me, it's because I'm here. Like we theorized, I fit the victim profile and the Invisible Man is furious I'm here. She could smell...us. What we were doing. She thinks what we did was polluting your bloodline. Since she couldn't get to me, she took someone else. Lady Komeda's group is the closest thing you have to a clan so she took the youngest vampire there to make a point."

"Makes sense," she allowed.

"But it doesn't hurt me," Hannibal said, puzzled. "I barely knew the woman."

Will shook his head. "No, no it's aimed at you, but it's not that personal. Emotional pain isn't the end goal. The goal is to cleanse the bloodlines. It's a warning to everyone. You stepped out of line so the clan had to be punished."

Hannibal's expression made it very clear that he didn't threaten easily.

"Whoever the Invisible Man is," Will said, "they're starting to lose it. The pattern is breaking down. I wouldn't be surprised if she goes after someone who isn't young, just to prove her point. Weak sires create weak childers."

"You think she might attack me?" Hannibal said, barely a question.

Will scrubbed a hand over his face. "Yeah," he said. "I think she might try. Whoever it is, is devolving rapidly. We might not have to find them. At this point we're more likely to catch them in the act. The problem is making sure the witnesses remember what they see." He

shrugged. "There has to be someone stronger than the Invisible Man but until they go toe to toe there's no way to tell. There isn't any way to tell, right?"

"Unfortunately, no." Lady Komeda said. "You should be safe with Hannibal, at least. He's like a bank vault."

Will glanced over in Hannibal's direction but he didn't seem concerned about the reference to his years fighting with Khirad for his own mind. "Let's not test the theory," Will said.

Hannibal drummed his fingers on an end table thoughtfully. "What if we provoke the Invisible Man enough to attack in a public place. Perhaps in her anger she might overreach. Someone here will be strong enough to stop her."

"You want to provoke a serial killer?"

"It's a thought."

"It's a terrible thought," Will said and sighed. "It might be our best chance though. God I hope I don't have to write an after-action report on this. I'll never hear the end of it from Jack."

"I'll leave you to settle things," Lady Komeda said. "I have to attend to poor Lene." She kissed the air next to Hannibal's cheek and let herself out.

Will gave it enough time that he was reasonably certain she wouldn't be able to hear them and then said, "So apart from spending the entire conference fucking, what do you suggest?"

Hannibal came over to him and flicked open the top button on Will's shirt. "It would make a good start."

Will caught his hands. "Not really in the mood, Hannibal," he said. "I just finished looking at a corpse."

Hannibal raised an eyebrow, as though to ask what that had to do with the price of eggs. "Does that honestly bother you?"

"No," Will said, "it doesn't bother me, but it doesn't put me in the mood either. The Invisible Man will need a cooling off period. I'm going to look around. Without you," he added when Hannibal started shrugging into his coat. "I need to look without you, Hannibal. People react differently when you're there."

"You shouldn't be talking to anyone without me there," Hannibal said.

Will did up the buttons on his shirt again. "Maybe not, but I bet you people will talk to me, whether I approach them or not."

"Will-"

"Please," Will said. "I'm asking you to trust me."

"It isn't you I don't trust," Hannibal said.

Will grabbed his sunglasses from the table by the door and hooked them onto his shirt. "Stay here, make breakfast or something. Think of ways to irritate a serial killer."

"I'm sure something will come to me," Hannibal said dryly. "I have respects to pay to other houses. I might as well do that while you get yourself into trouble."

Will left before he could change his mind.

He'd been told, during his 'orientation' that while vampires didn't have to sleep, not sleeping usually drove them insane within a few years. He had enough psychology and biology to understand the function of sleep and, with his history of mental instability, didn't test his ability to stay awake. Or, not longer than he had needed to pull a double shift back when he was working in the labs.

Either way, he was completely thrown off by the flat light and endless stretch of nothing past the cluster of cabins. Will's internal clock was completely messed up and he couldn't tell whether the half-light was getting brighter or not, but he was able to leave his sunglasses hooked into the neck of his shirt.

It struck him that before he'd met Hannibal, it probably would have made him melancholy, conjuring up thoughts of an endless stretch of years in front of him. Now he just wanted to bring the serial killer to justice so he could go back to enjoying his undeath for the first time. He hadn't understood how much he'd missed food and sex until he had it again. And the blood. The feeling of sinking his teeth into Hannibal's flesh. The pulse of blood over his tongue, warm in his stomach like a shot of perfectly aged whiskey.

Will schooled his runaway thoughts before he embarrassed himself. It was hard to conduct an investigation when you kept getting hard like a teenager, every stray thought a problem.

Perhaps it was too much to hope that he would be able to conduct his investigation without interference. A few questions here, a few conversations there. That was all he wanted. Instead, Will found himself cornered by Luc again.

"Christ, not you again," Will said, glancing around, looking for an exit. "I told you, I'm not interested." He was pretty well hemmed in. Enough that he wouldn't get past Luc without a fight.

Luc moved like a cat, predatory and focused, but he looked around, keeping an eye out for Hannibal. "Others will offer," he said. "Boldly, or secretly, you will be courted by other houses. You should take me up on it."

"Yeah, sure, thanks for the advice."

"Listen to me," Luc said, pushing with his glamour. Will could feel it, but if he didn't make eye-contact, he was safe, it slid off him like water.

"Not helping your case," Will said. "Now move out of my way."

"Lecter is dangerous."

"I didn't think it was his good table manners that kept him alive for hundreds of years," Will said sarcastically.

"A vampire without a house, without ties to any blood line, is like a lone wolf - they don't survive." Luc's pacing was more anxious than predatory now. "Prince Khirad went into the sun in the fifteenth century. Hannibal survived. There used to be many more of our kind, but the seventeen-hundreds were a time of great change. So many went into the sun. Most of the oldest of us are recluses, surrounded by their clan, refusing to be part of the world. Not Hannibal Lecter. He adapts. The lone wolf survives. Do you know how many people tried to kill him after Prince Khirad died?"

"Obviously not enough," Will said.

Luc wasn't deterred. "He's a thousand years old and he feels like he's far, far older. D'you see?"

"I can see how pissed off he's going to be if you don't get out of my way."

"He'll hurt you, darlin', bloodmate or not, and I'd hate to see that."

"What?" Will said. "No, never mind. I don't care."

Will decided to chance it, and started walking, intending to run if he had to. He didn't get the opportunity. Luc grabbed him by the wrists and pushed him back against one of the cabins. Will struggled, using reserves of strength he didn't think he had, but Luc didn't move so much as an inch. Luc pinned his wrists above his head, holding them there with one hand, and used his other hand to catch hold of Will's chin turning his head so they were face to face. Will shut his eyes.

"Look at me, Will Graham," Luc said, low and persuasive. He leaned in, nose and lips brushing over Will's ear, close enough to his throat that Will panicked.

Will did look then, startled and frightened, and Luc was right there. He was so beautiful.

Will opened for him, like he opened for Hannibal, a bowl, a mirror, an endless well of becoming and destroying.

Luc's wonderful green eyes widened, not in arousal, but in fear, and he sucked in a breath. Will could see-

Something ripped Luc from Will and threw him down into the snow. Will staggered, one wrist bleeding from Luc's nails, wounds already closing up. He was closing up too, the connection broken.

Hannibal was on top of Luc, the two of them struggling in the snow. Luc was tearing at Hannibal's chest with one hand, holding Hannibal under his jaw with the other, keeping his head pushed back. He was trying to claw out Hannibal's heart, Will realized. Hannibal was bleeding profusely, suit in ribbons. He twisted, pulling back, and Luc lunged up after him. It gave Hannibal the opening to duck under his reaching hands, and get his teeth into Luc's throat. He tore into Luc, ripping out a chunk of flesh.

"Hannibal," Will said, reaching out, some horrible mixture of fear and arousal running through him. "Don't take his blood," Will said, not for mercy, but because he didn't want to share that part of Hannibal with anyone.

Hannibal looked up at him, spitting out a mouthful of flesh and blood. "He put his hands on you," Hannibal said in a reasonable tone of voice, but he was still crouched over Luc like an animal.

Luc struggled weakly under him, but there was arterial spray arcing out over the wall of the nearest cabin; he'd lost too much blood to hurt Hannibal now. Hannibal put a hand on his neck anyway, holding him down.

"He tried," Will said.

"You're *mine*," Hannibal said, hand tightening on Luc's throat.

"Don't kill him," Will said. "You'll start a war."

Hannibal's expression cleared. Rage smoothing out into some possessive, jealous thing. "And burn the topless towers of Ilium," he said, half to himself. "Make me immortal with a kiss."

Chapter End Notes

Hannibal quotes from Doctor Faustus by Marlowe, the speech is addressed to Helen of Troy.

Comes With the Territory

Chapter Summary

Will catches on to some of Hannibal's more questionable choices.

Someone provided Hannibal with another shirt and a towel. The wound over his heart was completely gone but there was still blood matting his chest hair; Will wanted to lick it off. It was highly unlikely that he was going to get to do that at any point in the near future.

Luc had been carried off and Will had seen people more concerned about a punch in the head than anyone was about his welfare. He'd heal fast enough, given blood, but still, "He's lucky I didn't kill him," was probably not the best argument Hannibal could have made, in Will's estimation. But it seemed to be the one he was going with.

"Nor did I maim him with silver. In fact," Hannibal continued, "I think I have been extremely generous considering his display of dubious moral character."

Quite a speech from a man who had torn out another man's throat with his teeth.

Will and Hannibal had been escorted to a mostly unadorned room where they waited until Lady Komeda, and Luc's sire and head of household, Sabine, could be summoned.

Sabine of Pannonia, first of her line, was a statuesque woman wearing a Roman *stola* and *palla*. She towered over Lady Komeda in a way that would have been more comical if anyone had been anything but deadly serious.

Despite the uninspiring circumstances, Will was having some trouble focusing on the discussion at hand, and not on his desire to have Hannibal in pretty much every way imaginable, as soon as possible. Hannibal was too short on blood to sustain an erection, but if the amorous looks he was giving Will were any indication, they were in similar straits.

Will had long experience dealing with intrusive thoughts brought about by his empathy - more so once he'd become a vampire - but nothing was working. No matter how many times he tried to redirect his thoughts, they returned to Hannibal, to sex, and to blood. It had gone beyond the simple enjoyment of a new relationship, or even the excitement of having his first sexual relationship in a very long time. It wasn't a glamour, and it wasn't something Hannibal was doing to him, but there was something of the compulsive about it.

"According to Sabine, Mr Graham was rather encouraging towards Luc," Gentinanna said. "So you see where the problem is."

That helped Will focus.

"I did not encourage him!" Will said, outraged. "That's bullshit, and you know it."

"I say he did," Sabine said.

"You weren't even there!" Will said. Hannibal was staring at him intently, like a man dying of thirst who had been presented with a pitcher of water and wasn't yet allowed to drink it. Will crossed his legs to obscure his erection.

"Be quiet, Mr Graham," Gentianna said. "I already have one death to deal with, I do not need a blood feud starting as well."

"You say it was the second time he approached Mr Graham, but you didn't mention anything the first time?" Sabine said to Hannibal. "Either you don't care, or you're lying."

Hannibal turned his attention back to Sabine with visible effort.

"I think that's a new low," Will said. "You're not even blaming the victim, you're blaming the victim's 'companion.'"

"That's not quite how it works," Hannibal said to him, in low tones.

Lady Komeda's eyebrows were practically in her hairline. "No," she agreed. "It's not how it works at all. I would have thought he would know that."

Will had never thought the bureaucracy and technical protocols, and terminology of the FBI training academy would look minimal and reasonable. "Whatever it's called," he said. "I'm telling you, Luc was trying to glamour me."

"That's not what Luc says," Sabine snapped.

"He's doing a lot of talking for someone without a voice box," Hannibal said. "Or has it grown back already?"

Sabine snarled at Hannibal, an actual snarl. Something in Will's lizard brain wanted to run screaming into the light where it would be safe.

Gentianna raised her hands. "Silence, everyone. Hannibal says Luc was poaching. Luc says Hannibal's attack was unprovoked. No one is dead. I would like to see this resolved without further conflict."

"We are insulted!" Sabine said. "To what purpose is your deception, Hannibal? This boy is no fledgling. You have conspired with him to attack my house and have lied about his purpose at this gathering."

"This is the stupidest thing I've ever had to listen to," Will said. "I'm not listening to this. I'm here to catch the Invisible Man, okay? I'm not even forty years old. Total. I'm here because I'm an FBI Special Agent and I don't give a damn about your house, or attacking your honour, or anything else. I'm here to stop someone from killing more vampires. You keep your man away from me, we won't have any more problems."

"Will," Hannibal said, looking very disapproving.

"I beg your pardon, FBI?" Gentianna said. She didn't look disapproving, she looked horrified. "Hannibal, what do you have to say to that?"

Hannibal spread his hands in a 'what can I say' sort of way. "Will's - if you'll forgive the term - day job is as a teacher, training future FBI agents in behavioural profiling. He is not an agent himself, but he is a vampire. It's in everyone's best interest to catch the Invisible Man. I believe Will can discover the truth, and, moreover, I wanted him here. He is not here for nefarious purposes, but I believe he can be of use."

"FBI or not," Komdea said to Gentianna, "their relationship is clearly more than that. One does not simply bond with an agent to provide them cover. To suggest otherwise is nonsense. Hannibal has been in my household for many years, he is under my protection, as is his bloodmate."

It was the second time now that someone had used that phrase. Will shot Hannibal a questioning look, and Hannibal shook his head slightly. Not the time.

It never was, Will thought, irritated.

Gentianna stood, hands flat on the table. "Both houses claim insult but this, to me, seems like a personal problem. If Hannibal and Luc cannot solve their differences without bloodshed then they must keep their distance from one another for the duration of this gathering. Sabine, if you would excuse us, the matter of Mr Graham's *day job* needs to be discussed. I trust you can be discreet."

Sabine ground her teeth a little but from what Will understood about the rules, she had no ground to stand upon. She left with dignity, but she left.

"FBI," Gentianna said. "You understand the seriousness of what you have done, Hannibal?"

Hannibal shrugged, disinterested. "We have people in all levels of human government, the military, the Church. What difference is the FBI?"

"The difference, Doctor Lecter, is that you should have disclosed this information to the organizing body of this gathering. And don't think me so blind as not to see you did not share this information with Lady Komeda either."

Komeda didn't bother to protest that. Her own displeasure was palpable.

"My relationship with Will is my business," Hannibal said, mostly to Komeda. "Telling you would be a courtesy, and our relationship is new enough that I wanted to keep it to myself."

"And yet," Komeda said.

Will rubbed his face with his hands. "Please," he said. "Unless you're planning on asking me to leave, I'd like to- "

"We are all very aware of what you would like to do," Gentianna said. "I want to be kept apprised of your investigation, do you understand me?"

"I do," Will said.

"Go then," Gentianna said. "Enjoy whatever strange bargain you have struck."

Will didn't need to be told twice.

Back in their room, Will pulled a container of blood out of their fridge and tossed it to Hannibal who fielded it one-handed. "We are going to talk about everything that just happened," Will said, undoing his own belt. "Right after you fuck me."

Hannibal didn't bother with a cup, throat working steadily as he drained it. He kicked off his shoes and unbuttoned his shirt as he followed Will into the bedroom, new blood causing his erection to swell. "Anything you want," he promised, dropping the empty container on the floor.

"You say that, but I could fill a library with all the shit you don't tell me," Will said, fishing under the blankets for the lube. "Get your pants off." He didn't bother to wait for Hannibal to get with the program. He used his supernatural strength to pull Hannibal's belt from the loops with one harsh tug. Hannibal had to step forwards in order to avoid stumbling. He grinned at Will, fangs showing.

"Eager?" he said.

"Like you're not," Will said. "I see what you want."

Hannibal shoved Will hard enough to send him sprawling back on the bed. He stripped off his shirt and then grabbed Will by the hips, bodily flipping him over onto his stomach, hauling Will's trousers off.

Will was right. The bed was precisely the right height to be bent over. He opened his mouth to make some snide comment about vampires and their sexual proclivities when Hannibal went to his knees behind him.

"Oh, *fuck*," Will said, when Hannibal licked into him, strong hands spreading him open. It felt like forever since someone's performed this particular sex act for him. It was strange, almost ticklish at first, until Hannibal scraped his teeth over Will's skin, pulling him wide enough that Will ached. His cock pressed against the sheets until Hannibal jerked his hips back enough that his chest was still on the bed, but Will had nothing to rut against.

"You should probably know that I don't find possessive behaviour attractive," Will said and moaned when Hannibal pushed a finger into him, tongue on his stretched rim. "I don't," he said.

Hannibal used his shoulders to muscle Will's legs further apart and bit his femoral artery.

"Stop fucking around and put your dick in me," Will said. He could feel Hannibal's smile against his thigh right before he hooked another finger into Will, a rough burn. Will reached

back and grabbed a handful of Hannibal's hair. "I mean it," he said, pulling as much as he could at that angle.

Will could feel the shudder run through Hannibal before he got to his feet. Will heard the lube click open and then Hannibal was pushing into him.

"I told you," Will said, gasping at the stretch. "I know what you want."

"What do I want?" Hannibal murmured, mouthing over Will's shoulders.

"Get your hand on my dick," Will said, and wasn't surprised when Hannibal did as he was told. Will pressed his forehead into the sheets. "You've missed having someone who'll push back. No one who knows all the rules would dare upset the hierarchy."

"You're learning the rules," Hannibal said, fucking into him in long smooth strokes.

Will put a knee up on the mattress so Hannibal was pushing more firmly against his prostate. "Yeah," he said. "But I don't care. Jesus, that's good, keep going like that."

Hannibal's hand fisted into the sheets next to Will's shoulders. He was starting to breathe again, Will could feel it against his skin, coming in increasingly desperate gasps. His other hand stroked Will off. He was a quick study, it was just how Will liked it.

Will tilted his head to the side. "Bite me," he said, enjoying himself. He'd never been so bossy before, his empathy usually made sex more of something he did for someone. Reading what they wanted and using it to make them happy. But, right now, this *was* what Hannibal wanted, Will's demands, his lack of concern over Hannibal's own pleasure.

Hannibal's groan vibrated against Will's throat as he bit down.

"Don't drink," Will said, "just lick it."

Hannibal jerked against him and came. He fisted Will's cock harder and Will relaxed into his orgasm, Hannibal's dick still fat and twitching inside him.

Hannibal pulled back, teeth and cock, with a pleased sigh. "You're lovely," he said. He took a few slightly unsteady steps and collapsed down on the bed. He'd never even made it all the way out of his trousers. Hannibal pulled them off now, tossing them onto the floor.

Will climbed up after him, stretched luxuriously, and then sat up. "So, do you want to start with why I'm your companion but not visa versa, or are you happy to start with the whole 'bloodmate' thing?"

"Right now?" Hannibal asked, a plaintive note in his voice.

"Yes," Will said. "Right now, before you can start bullshitting me again."

Hannibal made an attempt to smooth his hair back into place and only partially managed it. "Companion has no opposing title. You might say, 'I am Hannibal's companion,' or I might say

that you are my companion but it would never be, 'Hannibal is my...' whatever the word might be."

"Possession through language," Will said. "That's fun." Admittedly, it wasn't nearly as bad as he had been fearing.

Hannibal smiled at him. "Exactly. I promise you, not telling you that was nothing sinister."

"No," Will said, "I get it. You explained it just fine when you used the ancient Greeks as your example. I got the concept." He crossed his arms over his bare chest, determined. "So what about the rest of it?"

"We shared blood," Hannibal said.

"What does that have to do with-" Will trailed off. "Damn it, Hannibal. What, exactly, does blood sharing do?"

"It's not something you do with just anyone," Hannibal allowed. "It is not an especially common occurrence."

"Not common like vampires can eat but most don't, or not common like it's some bizarre taboo."

"Neither. Most vampires are paranoid to a greater or lesser degree; slow to trust and jealous of their power. It's not just an exchange of blood, it's a sharing of power."

"The half-light," Will said. "It didn't hurt my eyes."

"Just so," Hannibal said. "Please, tell me if you notice anything else. I find this whole process fascinating. It's remarkable."

Will turned and ran a finger down the vein in Hannibal's bicep, leaning in to smell his hair. "Does it wear off?"

"Not even if I die."

Will had to admit that he couldn't be too mad about not having to suffer light-induced headaches any more. Unfortunately the odds of 'mate' meaning pairing or sharing were vanishingly small. He sighed, leaning back. "Hannibal," he said. "What was I agreeing to?"

"When two vampires from different lineages exch-"

"Hannibal."

"It forms a bond, during the exchange. Similar to what happens between sire and childer, but in this case between equals."

Will looked at Hannibal, aghast. "Did we get *married*!?"

Hannibal's mouth turned down like he'd tasted something unpleasant. "Of course not," he said.

Will let out a breath he didn't realize he had been holding.

"Marriage is a legal contract and a human social construct. This is, in actuality, till death do us part. It means," Hannibal said, "that you are mine." He had the audacity to sound hesitant, even a little shy, like he'd never intended to be so candid. "And it means I am yours."

"Are you fucking kidding me!" Will exploded. "We've known each other for a week. Less than!"

"That is more than enough time to know-"

"The fuck it is!" Will said. He got up off the bed, furiously pulling his clothes back on. Trousers and underwear together on the floor, shirt with the cuffs hanging open.

Hannibal didn't bother to get up from the bed. The sheet was rather precariously draped over his lap and he looked like one of the more lascivious paintings of a bygone era. "Where are you going?"

Will couldn't see his socks. He stuffed his feet into his shoes without them. "I'm finding someone with a plane and I'm getting the fuck out of here," Will said. "Before I do something you won't live to regret."

"The bond draws us together," Hannibal said. "You won't be able to stand the distance."

"Oh yeah?" Will said. "Want to bet?"

For the first time Hannibal looked uncertain. "Will," he said.

"What if we wind up hating each other? What if you get bored? Did you figure you could just get rid of me the same way you did Khirad?"

Hannibal's silence was damning. "You are an interesting man, Will Graham, I would not get rid of you," he said after too long a pause.

"You're a piece of work," Will said.

Hannibal sat up then, looking like he was about to follow after Will.

"Don't," Will snapped. "Stay here, because I don't think I can stand to be around you for another minute never mind an eternity." He made sure to slam the door behind himself - petty, but he knew it would annoy Hannibal because of its pettiness.

Suffer the Little Children

The plan was two-fold: Talk to Lady Komeda and pray she had a way home that Will could utilize. If that didn't work, ask literally anyone else. Even Luc. Possibly starting with Luc, just to really make the point.

The blue snow and the dark sky didn't hurt and that just fueled Will's annoyance. Of course he would have wanted such benefits, but he would have liked to weigh up the costs first. God only knew what Hannibal had taken on in return. Will couldn't think of a single aspect of his 'gift' that he would wish on his worst enemy. Not that Hannibal seemed to have had any adverse effects. Of course not, that would have been even odds, and as far as Will could see, Hannibal had made a career out of beating those. Will thought Hannibal might deserve a few restless sleeps filled with nightmares, at the very least, as punishment.

He'd had vague notions of really cutting Hannibal off - heading back to Quantico and tapping everyone he knew who owed him a favour to help him disappear for a while - to prove his point, but Hannibal had to be right about everything and he was right about the distance. Just thinking about the separation made Will feel a little queasy. So no disappearing, he'd just go back home, and refuse to see Hannibal. No doubt Hannibal would turn up anyway, but Will worked in a secure government building. If he didn't want to see Hannibal, Hannibal wasn't getting past the door, vampire or not. He just hoped Hannibal was too invested in manners and customs to just show up at Will's house.

Will reached the cluster of cabins that made up Komeda's party when Lady Amarantha and her male companion blocked his way. Will could feel his back molars grinding together as he clenched his jaw and tried not to blurt out the first ten things that came to mind, all of which were incredibly rude.

"Beg your pardon," he managed. "But I'm expected by Lady Komeda." It wasn't entirely a lie. He had the feeling that she wouldn't be very surprised to see him.

Lady Amarantha stared up at him with curiosity. Up close she looked like a little Victorian doll or a kid in a pageant, small and pretty, styled to within an inch of her life. Unlike the dead-eyed dolls, she had a gaze so sharp it felt like it could cut. Will held his ground. Not only would it be a bad idea to show weakness to another vampire, but he'd feel like an idiot backing away from a child, no matter how dangerous he knew she was.

"You waste your talents on the FBI, but now you have been found you can be brought to hand." She sounded thoughtful. "I thought your skills were exaggerated but I am pleased to see Khirad's line remains strong and you are, in truth, a wise enough choice for a bloodmate."

Will sighed. "What?" he said. He was done with vampires, done with their traditions, their powers and protocols and lineages.

"Perhaps not an auspicious start, but gold is found in amongst the rubble." She reached up, fast as lightning, and stroked her hand next to his face, millimetres away from touching his skin. Will cringed back, gooseflesh crawling over his body. "You had a sickness in your

blood," Amarantha said. "Not yet waking. It would come to you, had you remained human. These things can mutate with the turning. Perhaps that is what elevated your gift. Perhaps it was not a sickness at all."

Will scrubbed a hand over his face like that could get rid of the creeping feeling. "I'm going to go now," he said. "Have a nice day."

He nearly walked into her companion and startled back. As sharp as Amarantha's gaze was, her companion had the same glassy, dead eyes as the dolls she looked like. There had been life in his eyes the last time Will had seen him, but it was gone now. Will had the feeling like he could chip this man like porcelain and leave cracks in his skin, bits and pieces falling away until he could see underneath. He wondered if there was anything underneath.

Will fled, away from the sucking shadow inside Amarantha's companion and the knives in her mind. Amarantha didn't try to stop him, but he could feel her watching him until he turned a corner and broke her line of sight. Will let out a tremulous breath. His hands were shaking. Hannibal had said her bloodline was weak. If that was weak, he didn't want to know what strong felt like.

Will knocked on the door to Lady Komeda's rooms. It didn't matter, he was leaving. He was going home to his house, and his job, and Jack Crawford could take his investigation and shove it where the sun didn't shine.

He was greeted by a human servant who gave him the same look that Will had been getting all his life from people who thought they were his betters.

"Are you expected?" the man said.

"I'm Hannibal Lecter's bloodmate," Will said, because better to be hanged for a sheep than a lamb. "I have urgent business with Lady Komeda."

He was ushered inside, into the receiving area, not unlike his and Hannibal's own sitting room, but about twice or three times the size. Will wasn't alone in waiting. There were vampires of all ages, from those too old for Will to look at, to the youngest of the gathering - no more than three hundred at most.

Will settled himself onto a chair and pretended he didn't notice all the stares. Out of the corner of his eye he kept track of those in the room, but none of them had obviously murderous intent, and since this household had been the one under attack most recently, Will could only assume that the Invisible Man wasn't present.

Lady Komeda emerged from another room and waved at him. Will didn't wait to be told otherwise and followed after her. There were mutterings - no one liked a queue-jumper - but Will shut the door behind himself and he didn't have to listen to them any more.

He found himself in a secondary living room with a small tea set of chairs and a little wicker table.

Lady Komeda sat in one chair and gestured for him to take the other. Will did as he was bid. She was wearing all black, long skirts and a high-necked shirt that looked vaguely Victorian.

The colour made her look even smaller than she was, but did nothing to diminish her presence.

"I need a ride out of here," Will said before she could say anything. "I know there's no reason for you to help me, or do me any favours, but it's really important that I get back to Quantico as soon as possible."

"Have you discovered who the Invisible Man is?" Komeda asked eagerly, leaning forwards in her chair.

"No," Will said. "It's a personal matter."

She sighed, a wry smile curling up one side of her mouth. "What has Hannibal done now?" she asked. She sounded fond.

"It's personal," Will said again, between clenched teeth. "Can you help me or should I ask someone else?"

"Oh, my dear," Komeda said. "Running away never solved anything. You know Hannibal, he's stubborn and patient as a mountain. Better to have it out now."

Will refrained from telling her that, no, he didn't know Hannibal, and that was part of the problem.

But then, it did seem like he knew more about the man than just about anyone else. What he did to become a vampire, what he did to his sire, that he was lonely, a little bored, and he ate food and drank expensive wine...

"I need some perspective," Will said.

"If there is one thing I have learned in all my years," Komeda said, "it's that there is no real way to separate yourself from your own experiences. You have an eternity to live, don't waste those years over-thinking everything. You have to take every moment and just live it."

Will rubbed his palms over the knees of his suit trousers. "You're not going to help me get out of here, are you?"

"Absolutely not," Komeda said. "We need you here to find the Invisible Man. Even if Hannibal is being difficult."

That was one word for it. But without Hannibal in front of him, Will's anger was waning. Maybe they would get tired of each other, but it was worry about the future that was most upsetting to Will. No, he didn't like Hannibal's lies of omission, or his presumption, but fear of what was to come wasn't actually useful. And maybe it was the bond, or maybe it was that Hannibal was the most interesting thing to happen to Will in years and years, but he didn't really want to go back to Wolf Trap, alone in his cold little house.

Komeda nodded at him as though he'd said any of that out loud. "Go to him," she said. "Make him work for your forgiveness." She winked. "That's half the fun."

Will stood up, swallowing his embarrassment. "Thanks," he said. "Thank you."

She waved him away and Will went back out into the cold. He stood there for a while, staring up at the sky, letting the snow skate over his face, catching in his eyelashes, breath barely steaming as his body adjusted to the temperature.

He would continue the investigation. There were several more events he could go to and he would sit there unobtrusively and watch everyone, read everyone until he passed out from a headache or he discovered who the Invisible Man was.

A sharp pain in his head made Will flinch and stagger. He was so used to migraines that it took him a minute to realize that the pain wasn't his own. It didn't linger, it didn't hurt after that initial flash. Realization flooded over him: it was Hannibal. Whatever else their supposed bond was supposed to do - and as soon as Hannibal was accounted for, Will was going to find out all the details - an early warning system that let one know when the other was in trouble seemed to be a feature.

Will ran for their cabin, shoes slipping on the ice, as he skidded into the turns. He went down for a second, clawing his way back to his feet, running half bent over, hands on the ground for balance before he found his footing again.

He crashed into the door so hard it hit the wall and bounced closed again. Lady Amarantha and her companion were there. She glanced in his direction for just a second and then turned her attention away. Her companion had eyes only for her.

She flicked her long hair back, away from her face. "Hannibal Lecter," she was saying. "I'll break you open like you've never had done to you before. Don't worry, if he survives your death, I will take care of your pretty prodigy and see his talent nurtured."

It took Will a second to even see where Hannibal was. He'd evidently been preparing to come after Will, half-dressed, shirt still unbuttoned, barefoot. Amarantha had him down on his knees, straining against her glamour like a dog against a chain. There was a knife on the floor in front of him but Hannibal had dug trenches into the floorboards rather than pick it up. His teeth were bared in a rictus snarl, pupils so small his eyes looked completely crimson.

"It's you," Will said. "You're the Invisible Man. Of course it's you."

Hannibal turned to look at Will, and his slip in concentration allowed the compulsion to take hold. He grabbed the knife before he let out a growl, eyes closing. His hand spasmed as he tried to drop the knife again but he couldn't quite relax his grip.

"Will, go, don't look at her!" Hannibal said. "Get away from here! Go!"

Amarantha's smile was too old and cruel for her pretty face. "Dmitri," she said absently, and her companion started towards Will. "I think he should stay."

Will grabbed the nearest end table and swung it into the wall so it splintered, one leg snapping off into a stake as long as Amarantha's little-girl arm. "Fucking try it," Will said and lunged at Dmitri.

Amarantha turned her attention to Will and the second she did, Hannibal was up and moving, fast as a cobra. He kept hold of the knife, slashing at Dmitri's throat as Dmitri caught the stake and used Will's momentum to drive it into Hannibal's body. All three men staggered apart, Dmitri gushing blood from his neck, throat opened so far Will could see spine. His body dropped to the floor.

Will was drenched in blood and he wiped it from his eyes in time to see Hannibal collapse to his knees, making a low grunting sound as he pulled the stake out of his torso. He was healing though, it had gone in low, too low down to kill him. Hannibal coughed up blood, hand going to his stomach, pressing down.

Amarantha snarled like an animal and took hold of Will's shirt, hauling him down so she could grab his face, forcing eye contact. She was shockingly strong, the bones of his jaw felt like they might break under her fingers.

"Don't," Will said, "don't do it."

He felt her forcing her way into his head, helpless to look away. Will opened up to her the same way he had opened up to Hannibal, but she wasn't stopping and that strange connection was formed. He had tasted this power before. They had been such brief moments before he hadn't realized what was happening. Now Will understood: Hannibal had asked for a kiss, but Hannibal had been the one to lean in, not him. Then Luc had tried to glamour him, and it was fear Will had seen in his eyes, because as foolish as Luc was, he had seen this. He had figured out what Will could do.

Will was a mirror, and he was a prism, he was diamond, he was sharp enough to cut through anything; the soft, delicate gyri and sulci of the mind were nothing to him.

He saw Amarantha realize this even as she said, "Ungrateful creature, take that knife and punish yourself."

He felt it echo through him, reflecting back. Amarantha picked up the long knife from the floor, turned it in her grip and stabbed herself in the chest. Will felt frozen in place, eyes still wide, still locked on hers.

Then Hannibal was up again. He grabbed Amarantha; she was small enough that he lifted her easily but she was still holding the knife. Amarantha slashed at Hannibal's arms in order to get to her own body, plunging the knife in again. He managed to grab her wrist, blood making it hard to keep a grip on her slippery skin.

"Will," Hannibal said. "Will you need to stop this."

There was so much reflecting in him. All Amarantha's ageless cruelty and hatred, her fear, the strength behind her glamour. Will could see how it would unfold. She would fight Hannibal, under her own compulsion, she would tear him apart and then kill herself.

"*Stop*," Will said, in a voice that rang with power.

Hannibal and Amarantha both went still. He let her go and she fell to the ground, already bleeding too much to heal herself.

"Coward!" Amarantha screamed, struggling to rise out of the pool of her own blood. "You don't have the courage to survive. You can't even finish what you've begun."

Hannibal stopped as well. He went to his knees, hands pressed flat, forehead pressed to the back of his hands. Hannibal looked up, pupils dilated. "Will Graham," he said voice rough and low.

Will stared at him - was he *turned on*?

"The terrible things you could do," Hannibal said.

Will grabbed Dmitri, and dragged his body out of the cabin. A vampire saw him haul Dmitri out into the snow and took off running. Will ignored her, heading back inside to pick Amarantha up. He dropped her next to Dmitri. "Explain yourself to the council," he said, still full up with her power. "Let them finish it."

There were other things he needed to do, that he had to do.

Hannibal was still on his knees, down on the floor, when Will came back inside. The room reeked of blood but all Will could smell was Hannibal; his arousal, his desire. And Will still had power to spare.

"Get your clothes off," Will snapped, kicking off his shoes, and watched Hannibal obey.

Hannibal did as he was told. He was breathing, panting, and already hard. Hannibal wrapped a bloody fist around his cock as Will settled himself in the nearest chair because he was finding it difficult to keep his feet.

"Lie down," Will said. "Get your hands off your dick, and keep them by your sides." He stripped off his suit jacket and unbuttoned his trousers, making himself comfortable.

The muscles on Hannibal's arms and chest stood out as he tried to disregard Will's command, testing out the limits of Will's power and his own ability to disobey. Thick strings of pre-cum rolled down his cock. He manage to hold out for several long seconds before both hands gripped the carpet.

"You don't have to struggle, I know how much you want to let me in." Will said. He made himself comfortable, head swimming with power. "Why not relax into it?"

"If you want it," Hannibal said, head tipped back to display the long line of his throat, "then take it."

Will reached over with his bare foot and pressed gently against Hannibal's cock. "Mmm, I see how you like it. But you know I already have it, you've already given it up."

"Of course I have," Hannibal said, it sounded like he was laughing. "Come over here, darling boy, let me taste you."

"Not yet," Will said, enjoying himself, enjoying his ability to deny Hannibal. "If I told you to cum, without doing anything else, would that do it?"

Hannibal gasped for air, eyes closing, an ecstatic pleasure on his face. "Yes," he said.

"And if I told you not to?" Will palmed himself through his trousers, pressing down to relieve the ache. "How long could I make you wait?"

"As long as you wanted." Hannibal said.

"You wouldn't fight me?"

"No," Hannibal said, he'd bitten his bottom lip until it bled.

Will slid off the chair and knelt over Hannibal's hips, keeping his body up too far for Hannibal to rut against. He leaned down to lick at the blood beading on Hannibal's mouth. "Look at you," he said. "So desperate for it."

"Will," Hannibal said, pleading, as Will stood. He fought against the glamour, only managing to arch his spine in a pleasing curve before slumping back down.

The door slammed open and Will didn't even bother to turn his head. *"Get out,"* he said unbuttoning his shirt slowly, enjoying Hannibal's agony, and heard the door shut again.

Will grabbed the lube and poured a perfunctory amount on Hannibal's cock. It twitched and Hannibal groaned. Will fisted it twice before pulling his trousers off and settling back down over Hannibal.

"Say please," Will said, teasing.

Hannibal smirked up at him. "I'll say more than that for you," he said. "But, please, my dear, be kind."

Will held Hannibal's cock steady and sat down on it. He hissed between his teeth, adjusting to the stretch, not open anymore from before, but relaxed enough, high enough on his own power to enjoy it.

"Don't cum," Will said, rocking on Hannibal's cock, chasing his own pleasure. "Stay hard for me."

Hannibal couldn't do anything but comply, hands leaving bruises on Will's thighs and hips. Will sliced his own tongue open on his fangs and leaned over, letting his blood drip into Hannibal's mouth. Hannibal planted his feet on the floor, getting some leverage, and thrust up into Will, and Will rested his hands on Hannibal's chest, leaning over to get the perfect angle.

"That's good," Will said. "Just like that. Look at me."

Hannibal looked up at him, adoring, and Will could feel him open up the same way he had before. Hannibal's eyelashes fluttered and he made a soft, desperate sound. Will wanted to see him like that forever. He was powerful, and dangerous, and he belonged to Will.

Under the compulsion, he could make Hannibal go as long as he wanted, but Will wanted to get off. He wrapped a hand around his own cock and stroked. Coming was like being bitten

for the first time, like feeling the rush of power from glamouring someone deliberately, like his first taste of blood. He shuddered to a stop, cum striped up Hannibal's chest, pooled on his stomach.

Will climbed off Hannibal and slumped against the leg of a chair, laughing a little from the endorphins. He hadn't felt so good in years. Hannibal might have been manipulative, and secretive, and a metaphorical thorn in Will's side, but god did he keep providing Will with increasingly transcendent experiences. "How're you doing?" he asked,

"Wonderful," Hannibal said, sounding very strained. "How long-"

"As long as I want. Do you like when I do this? Knowing I can see you?" Will said and watched a thick bead of precum slide down the side of Hannibal's cock. "That's what I thought," Will said, idly playing with Hannibal's foreskin, rubbing it up and down the head until Hannibal cried out.

Will leaned over and bit Hannibal's throat, tasting his blood before saying, in low tones against Hannibal's ear, "I know now you're only a thousand years old. This whole thing you've got going on, it's to make people suspect they're underestimating your age, but really, you're so young in comparison to the others you run with." He licked at the broken skin. "I want you to get a couple fingers into yourself. Here-" Will pulled Hannibal's hand to the mess of lube and precum on his dick, "use this."

He pushed one of Hannibal's legs back towards his chest to make it easier for him to comply. Hannibal's eyes were wide, pupils barely pinpricks of black. "Will," he said, body already moving without his say-so. The glamour was fairly literal, and Will watched as Hannibal pushed two fingers into himself, his hole already pinkening.

"It's okay," Will said. "That's why you picked me. You knew I'd see eventually." He kissed Hannibal who moaned into his mouth, panting. Will scraped his nails down Hannibal's chest to watch him twitch. "You didn't just kill Khirad," he said. "Get another finger in there."

Hannibal bit back a sound that was almost a whimper when he stuffed another finger into his hole.

"You drank him dry before you killed him. Took as much of his strength as you could. You said that was how bloodmates work, but it's more than that. Vampires who share their blood with another, it's sharing power as well. That's what you gave me. It's what you took from him. Another."

Hannibal shuddered, his whole body shaking under the strain. "Please, Will. Have mercy."

"No," Will said. He could actually see the moment when Hannibal would have cum if he hadn't been under the glamour.

He waited until Hannibal was able to focus on him again and then said, "I'm right though."

"Of course you are," Hannibal strained upwards, stealing a kiss. "You're perfect." Will felt it when he pushed the fourth finger in. He eased Hannibal's leg back down, which wasn't as good for penetration, but meant he could sit back down on Hannibal's cock.

"You should fuck yourself with them now," Will said.

It took Will longer to get off, the second time, and by the end of it, Hannibal was a wreck underneath him. By Will's count the glamour had kept him from coming at least three times and he worked himself onto his own fingers and up into Will.

Will finally shifted up Hannibal's body so he could fuck Hannibal's mouth. "You can cum now," he said, "as soon as you get me off."

Hannibal's free hand gripped Will's thigh, digging fingernail marks into the skin. His mouth was warm with blood, he must have bitten his own tongue or the inside of his mouth, and it felt wonderful on Will's cock. The second he started to cum down Hannibal's throat, he could feel Hannibal shake underneath him, whole body trembling as he came, finally released from the glamour.

Will slumped to the side and lay on the floor, slowly coming back to himself. The feeling of being inside Hannibal's head faded, and by the time he had recovered his wits, he was alone with his own thoughts. Hannibal, next to him, was licking his lips, chasing the last bit of Will's cum. He was totally limp and relaxed, eyes closed, and he was smiling like he couldn't help himself. Will wanted to kiss him but he was too far away and Will was in no state to move.

Then, with a dawning sense of having missed something very important, Will thought back over their encounter.

"Did someone try to come in?" Will asked, after a moment.

Hannibal opened one eye. "What? Oh. Yes."

Will didn't have the energy to be as horrified as he wanted to be. "Let me guess, they won't even care that we were fucking on the floor. Or that I literally threw two murderers out the door so we could fuck on the floor?"

"Of course not," Hannibal said, putting his hands behind his head. "Why should they?"

"Or that I glamoured that person into leaving?"

Hannibal's smile showed his crooked teeth and his fangs. "No."

"Are they even going to care that I caught the Invisible Man?"

"They won't give her to the FBI if that's what you're asking," Hannibal said. "Will, darling, I'm not sure I can feel my legs yet. Perhaps we could wait until we've recovered before inviting trouble."

Will managed to roll over so he was curled against Hannibal. He thought maybe later he would be embarrassed about being seen that way, and worried about what his newfound abilities mean, but for the time being he was just pleased he'd positioned himself in precisely the right place to tuck his head against Hannibal's shoulder and chest. "I bet I could do that again, if I tried."

Hannibal swallowed, hard. "Oh," he said, faintly. "I think I would very much enjoy that."

"Mmm-hmmm," Will said. He wanted a nap, but he had the feeling that wasn't in the cards for him. Shower, clothing, some sort of idiotic vampire tribunal...He blinked and realized he'd very nearly dozed off despite himself. Maybe he would nap first. If no one else was bothered by proper procedure, Will wasn't sure why he had to be.

"I would like you to move in with me," Hannibal said, voice a low rumble in his chest. "You've seen my house in Baltimore, but if it's not to your taste, I'd be happy to look elsewhere." He carded his finger through Will's hair, obviously disinclined to move either.

Will sighed. "You know, for a guy who's going to live forever, you move kind of fast."

If Hannibal had any reply to that, Will didn't hear it because he was asleep.

Epilogue: Van Helsing

Chapter Notes

> Thank you everyone who has been so patiently waiting for this last chapter. Your enthusiasm and enjoyment so far was a big part of my being able to get this done. Every comment, every kudos, and every bookmark made a big difference to me.

The bright florescent lights of Quantico had not improved with absence. Even Hannibal was squinting a little under the harsh glow. Will had his sunglasses back on, which helped him avoid Jack's eyes.

"What do you mean you caught the Invisible Man and I can't have him?" Jack said.

Will sighed and slumped down in the uncomfortable chair across from Jack's desk.

Jack had been waiting for Will at the airport. The minute the plane touched down, Jack was there to drag him back to Quantico for a debrief.

Hannibal, who had complained at length on the flight back about the tedious business of mortal affairs, came along quietly because right before they landed Will gave him a fantastic blow-job but didn't finish him off. The deal was, if Hannibal behaved himself, he got to fuck Will in his office at the FBI academy. Hannibal had been carrying his jacket in front of himself since then.

"I mean," Will said, "we found out who the Invisible Man was, caught her in the act - she's a she, by the way - and now she's in the custody of some kind of...vampire tribunal. What was I supposed to do?"

Jack's face was like a thundercloud. "You were supposed to arrest her! What sort of cockamamie bullshit is a vampire tribunal? This is the United States of America and we are the FBI."

"There is precedent," Hannibal said. "In eighteen fifty-"

"You do not want to finish that sentence, Dr Lecter," Jack said. "Unless you are somehow mistaking me for a man who cares."

Hannibal crossed one leg over the other at the knee. "Her name is Amarantha, first of her line. She is three thousand years old and her powers of glamour would make holding her in a mortal cell impossible. However, for violating both the territories of others and the peaceful accord of our gathering, her progeny have been slain and she will face her punishment. She will not trouble you, Agent Crawford, for she will be locked away until you are long dead. If

the madness takes her again, if another treaty is violated, she will also be slain. So your children and their children need not fear her."

"Goddamnit," Jack said, sitting down. The wind had been taken out of his sails. "That's not how we do things."

"I've written up the report already," Will offered. He put the file down on Jack's desk. It was almost eighty-percent lies and didn't mention anything about anything that had happened to him. Not the fight with Luc. Not the new relationship that he and Hannibal had. And nothing about the new-found powers that Will had discovered. He figured it was none of the FBI's business. "There's a number in there for the arbiter of the gathering, Gentianna. If you have any questions."

"And I'm sure she'll be happy to answer them all," Jack said bitterly.

Will tapped his fingers on the file and then stood. "I'm sorry, Jack, I know you wanted to bring her in. But she's done. At least no one else will get hurt."

Hannibal stood also. His jacket was still artfully draped over one arm. Will was almost impressed.

"Show him the Van Helsing case," Jack said to Will. "See if he's got any thoughts on that. Since you two seem to work well together. But you better believe I'm arresting that motherfucker when we catch him."

Will looked over at Hannibal. "You don't have to," he said. "It's pretty gruesome."

Hannibal's face was a placid mask. "I would be happy to offer my services to the FBI," he said smoothly.

He wasn't so smooth a half hour later, when Will had his office door locked behind him, Will was sitting on the edge of his desk, and Hannibal was finally getting to finish what Will had started on the plane. Then, Hannibal's hair hung down into his eyes, and he was biting at Will's shoulder, not really drinking, just licking at the blood, as he fucked Will over the desk. Will's trousers hung off one leg, and Hannibal's were only just pulled down far enough that he could get his cock into Will. He'd unbuttoned Will's shirt though - torn it open, really - so he could lick, and bite, and mouth over Will's chest.

Will clapped a hand over his own mouth to keep from making too much noise, the other holding on to Hannibal's shoulders, and used the leg he had hooked up over Hannibal's hips to urge him to move faster.

Hannibal braced himself more firmly on the desk, nails leaving little indents in the cheap wood, and gave it to him like Will kept begging for from behind his hand.

He came in Will, pulled out, bodily turned him over, and knelt down to lick his own cum out of Will's ass.

"Jesus fuck," Will said, and came all over some poor fucker's homework assignment. He stayed there, braced on shaking arms, groaning under his breath with overstimulation, until

Hannibal was satisfied.

Hannibal got slowly to his feet, still breathing heavily, and pulled his trousers up. Will reached out and smoothed his hair down as Hannibal buttoned himself back up.

"You don't have to look at the Van Helsing case," Will said. "Jack can't make you."

Hannibal kissed him. "I love watching you work," Hannibal admitted. He submitted to being a leaning post as Will hauled his trousers back on. "The unique paths your mind can take are fascinating. When I said I would be happy to help the FBI, I meant that I would be happy to help you."

Will examined the sorry state of his own buttons, gave it up for a bad job, and just threw his jacket on over top. He had the suspicious feeling he still looked like he'd been worked over pretty hard. Hannibal, the asshole, looked like he had before they started. "Well...know that you can back out. Any time. I mean it."

Hannibal shrugged his coat on. "As you say," he agreed.

Hannibal took them back to his house, without asking. He'd made his intentions very clear, and Will realized it was up to him to leave or stay, as he pleased. There was nothing waiting for him back at his cold little house in Wolf Trap, so he figured he could indulge Hannibal for a while. Especially since Hannibal had announced his plans to properly cook for Will, now that he had his own kitchen to work out of.

Three days later, and Will still hadn't gone home. He'd thought it would be strange, living in Hannibal's space, but it was surprisingly easy. Hannibal had his patients, Will had his classes. Will slipped into Hannibal's life as smoothly as he'd slipped into his mind. He'd caught Hannibal looking at him oddly, on occasion, but it was sort of a stunned disbelief that Will hadn't run off back into the woods yet, and Will mostly ignored it. Ignoring it led to sex, because Hannibal intuitively knew when Will wasn't paying him attention, and would immediately seek to rectify that. And regular sex wasn't getting old anytime soon.

"I have a present for you," Hannibal said, coming back to the house on the fourth day. "I recall you said your dogs wouldn't come near you after your change. Sadly, that is often the case with pets. However," Hannibal presented him with tiny squirming bundle wrapped up in a soft towel. He deposited his burden into Will's arms. "There is no reason for a puppy to reject you as she doesn't know you by any other scent."

Will looked down at the tiny creature. "She's too young to be away from her mother," he said softly.

"Her mother died," Hannibal said. "She's a rescue. Your rescue, if you want her."

The puppy whined, high and unhappy, and burrowed her nose into his armpit. She was no bigger than the palm of his hand. "You don't have to bribe me to get me to move in," Will said, grinning fit to burst, and realized it was true.

Hannibal shrugged, feigning nonchalance. "I saw a chance to please you and took it."

"How about, if you want me to move in, you could maybe take down some of your weird antler decor and try putting up something that's not completely insane."

Hannibal frowned over at one of his terrible flower and antler displays. "I enjoy the combination - life and death, decay and -"

"Oh God," Will said. "I'm sorry I asked. Just clear out a space for my fishing stuff. I'll catch us something fresh and you can work your magic on it to make it edible. I haven't had fresh fish since I was turned."

"I know you don't like this house," Hannibal said, too seriously.

Will sighed. "Hannibal, listen, I don't care. My place, it's got pink wallpaper because that's what the old couple living there put up, and I've never been bothered enough to change it. I just...I'm not this...neat. Everything in here is like a museum piece. I'm nervous about moving anything, never mind breaking things."

Hannibal reached out and tipped an entire vase filled with antlers, flowers, and white, curling twigs, onto the floor. The vase, which had probably been expensive, shattered. "That vase was made in 1793. I don't care," Hannibal said.

"Oh hell," Will said. "I'm going to find somewhere to put the puppy." He reached for the swell of power that let him open Hannibal up like a book. "*You are going to get upstairs and get naked.*"

Hannibal didn't even bother to resist. His grin was positively wolfish.

Will checked the puppy over. Other than her terrible smallness, she seemed like she was in pretty good health. He warmed up some tea towels in the microwave and made her a little nest in one of Hannibal's larger glass food storage containers. There was goat milk in the fridge, which he also warmed up and carefully fed to her. The puppy hiccoughed, curled up, and started snoring - a ridiculous squeaking sound.

Satisfied, he grabbed his book bag and took both his marking and the puppy with him.

Hannibal was naked alright. He was lying on his back, one foot planted flat on the bed, the other knee tipped to the side so Will could get a good look at his hard cock, shiny with lube, and where he had two fingers buried in his ass.

Hannibal smirked at him. "I thought I'd be ready for whatever you wanted."

Will carefully put the dish down near the bed, and dropped his book bag next to it. His mouth felt dry - which it didn't actually do anymore - and he couldn't decide. He wanted to fuck Hannibal and feel him tight and hot around him. He wanted Hannibal's fat cock inside him, stretching him out.

"Why not both?" Will said happily, and climbed onto the bed. "What's your refractory period?"

"Probably longer than you would like."

"Not if I say otherwise," Will said, stripping off his clothes. Hannibal swallowed visibly. "So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to ride you until you come and then I'm going to fuck you, and you're going to get hard again, and come again for me, aren't you?"

Hannibal reached out for Will, helping to settle him in place. Will sank down onto his cock, his body no longer feeling like a strange, cold burden as it easily opened up, vampire stamina and healing making everything slick and easy.

"You are," he said, angling his hips so he could really feel Hannibal's cock against his prostate. "You're going to give me whatever I want. You can't help it." He kissed Hannibal wetly, tongues slit open on sharp teeth so they both had a mouthful of each others' blood. "You've been getting your own way for far too long, haven't you?"

Hannibal tipped his head back, groaning, the long line of his throat exposed. "You're a menace," he said.

Will fucked himself leisurely on Hannibal's cock, hands planted on Hannibal's chest to feel the muscle there, enjoying the strength coiled under his palms.

"You can go ahead and come whenever you want," Will said, feeling generous. "I've decided I want to fuck you now."

Hannibal started to laugh. He caught hold of Will's face and pulled him down to kiss again. "You're terrible," he said, against Will's lips. "You're terrible and you must never leave me."

"*Come now,*" Will said. And Hannibal did.

He put Hannibal on all fours and fucked him for a while, enjoying the startled, overstimulated noises he made, until he could feel his own orgasm creeping up on him. His next command got Hannibal hard again and he turned Hannibal over so he could watch the tortured, ecstatic expression on his face. Maybe he should have been concerned by how much Hannibal wanted him - his desire shading easily into obsession - but that was a problem for another day. Will pulled out and came all over Hannibal, rubbing it into the hair on his stomach, slicking up Hannibal's cock with it, and jacking him with exquisite slowness until Hannibal came again.

Hannibal got them a cloth to clean up with, and then they lay quietly together for a while, dozing, until Will roused himself with a groan. His work wasn't going to do itself.

Will tugged lightly on Hannibal's chest hair. "You can go and clean up the vase," he said. "I know it's driving you crazy. Anyway, I need to start marking these god-awful essays my students wrote."

Hannibal opened his eyes, curious. "What was the topic?"

"Why doesn't Van Helsing keep his victims longer." Will leaned over the side of the bed so he could rummage through his bag and pull out the stack of essays. The puppy was still squeaking through her nap.

"Why doesn't Van Helsing keep them longer?" Hannibal asked. He smacked Will's ass and smirked at him when Will gave him a disapproving look.

Will flopped back against the pillows and uncapped his pen. The first essay had a typo in the title. It did not bode well for the rest of the paper. "You sure you wouldn't rather clean up the vase?"

Hannibal curled up against him, with his head on Will's shoulder, so he could look at the essays as well. "There is nowhere in this world I would rather be," he said, and Will couldn't hear one note of a lie in his voice. "Now, tell me about this killer."

"He's an intelligent sadist," Will said, settling in. "Never kills the same way twice and his targets are extremely diverse. They're not chosen at random, but their only connection is Van Helsing himself. He has a specific reason for choosing them, it's not totally random, but what that is, we're not sure."

"It could be a hate crime," Hannibal said.

Will kissed his soft, fine hair. "Because he only kills vampires? No. Hate crimes are crimes of passion and these are...calculated. Whimsical at times. Artistic creations. That's why he doesn't keep them prisoner longer. He tortures them for exactly as long as it takes to realize his creation. All these crime scenes, they're installations. He's telling us something, about the victims and about himself. I just have to learn how to interpret them."

"Clever boy," Hannibal said. "I have no doubt you'll understand." He lay quietly for a moment, stroking Will's skin idly and then said, "This student uses the possessive apostrophe when they mean to have a plural. And they are candidates for the FBI? They are lucky to have you, Will, or I fear no one would ever see these killers."

Will sighed. "Yeah," he said.

The End.

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